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Dishonorable Lady

The story of a modern Delilah

**RICHARD
LEE**



This book, originally
published as **WANDA**
has been slightly abridged
for easy reading.



DISHONORABLE LADY

The Story of a Modern Delilah

Wanda Fulton ran away from home at seventeen. She arrived in New York with \$186 and a firm determination to make money as fast as she could, no matter how she did it.

She was as beautiful as fire, as tempting as sin and as cold as a calculating machine. She learned the important things in her life quickly; how to make men love her and how to make them pay. But Wanda had no place for love in her own heart, not for Dennis, who was poor and wanted to make a fortune for her; not for Van Dyke who was rich and ready to give up a fortune to marry her. Not for any of the men who were ready to give her anything for her love.

Wanda played a man's game in a man's world. She was a modern Delilah who knew that the way to a woman's riches is through a man's heart . . . until she decided that she, too, needed love more than greater wealth.

DISHONORABLE LADY

By Richard Grant

An Abridged Edition

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All the names and characters described
in this novel are fictitious, and have no
reference to any person, living or dead.

*This novel was originally published under the title,
"Wanda." It has been slightly abridged in order to accom-
modate it within the available number of pages. However,
its original plot and continuity has in no way been impaired.*

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CHAPTER 1

"You've gotta count ten and you dassent peek."

Wanda Fulton gave a quick glance at Frankie Stewart, who stood facing a tree and leaning against it with his arm across his eyes. He already was beginning to count, "One—two—three." Wanda dashed toward the barn. Two other girls had gotten there first and amid excited whispers they scampered into different empty horse stalls.

Wanda started toward the spiral staircase that led to the loft above and then changed her mind. All the children liked to hide there, burying themselves in the hay. That might be the first place that Frankie would look. Suddenly making up her mind Wanda dove for the corn box. Opening the lid she crawled in and pulled it shut over her. She peeked out of a crack.

Frankie entered and glanced at the spiral staircase. He moved toward it when from one of the stalls came a muffled snicker. He ran over to it.

"It's you, Mary."

"How did you know it was me?" she demanded crawling out. "You couldn't see me?"

"No, but I know no one would be so dumb about snickering except you."

Wanda's lip curled in mild disgust. Quickly she lost all interest in playing Hide and Go Seek. Fourteen, she was pretty old for such things.

"Mary's it," Frankie cried as several more children entered the barn.

"Oh gee, let's not play any more. Let's go swimming."

"Just because you're it," Frankie started to protest. "All right, everybody get their suits and we'll meet at the bay."

The children scattered. Wanda lifted the box cover and leaned it against the barn wall. She ran her bare arm through the kernels of corn. How good they felt next to her skin! She dug her legs into the corn and then with sudden inspiration

took off her shoes and stockings. The corn was cool and tinglish on her legs. She lay still for a moment. No one ever would know. Quickly she pulled her dress over her head and then her slip. Sitting up, she bent down and unbuttoned her panties and took them off. Completely nude, she pulled the cover of the box down again and lay on the corn. She dug her body into the kernels and squeezed hard against them. Being in the corn was the same as swimming, except that it was nicer, especially when she pressed hard against it and the kernels hugged and rubbed against her.

Someone might find her. Suppose her father came home for some reason and opened the lid. She would get a terrible beating. Wanda pushed up the lid and dressed hurriedly. She decided to go up into the hay loft and bury herself in the hay. Her father never could find her there. She hated her father.

She climbed the staircase. She came around the top bend and stopped.

The man sitting on the hay just above the staircase smiled at her. He motioned with his finger.

Wanda hesitated. She knew the man. It was Pete Anderson. He rented boats for fishing. Everybody was friendly with everybody else in Bay Meadows. Wanda smiled a little uncertainly. She was puzzled as to what he was doing in her father's hay mow.

The man put his finger over his lips. He continued to smile at her.

"Come here." He patted a place in the hay beside him.

Wanda ascended the last few steps and stood before him.

"I want to talk to you about something. You can keep a secret, can't you?"

Wanda nodded her head. She had found it necessary to keep many secrets from her parents.

The man reached in his pocket and extracted a twenty-five cent piece. "Would you like this?"

"Yes." Wanda never had possessed as much as twenty-five cents at one time in her life. It seemed like a great deal of money to her.

"Come back in the hay where no one can see us and I'll give it to you."

"Can't you give it to me here?"

"No, your mother might see us. Come on. I won't hurt you." Without standing up the man humped his way back

into the hay. "Sit here," he grimaced.

Timidly she went over to him and gingerly sat in the seat he had made for her in the hay.

"What were you doing down in that big box?" he queried.

"Just—just playing." Her face flushed. "What were you doing here?" she asked bashfully.

"Waiting for you or one of the girls to come up so I could talk. You mustn't tell anybody. If you won't I'll give you the quarter and then we can meet here often."

"But what for?" Wanda was frightened but her father never gave her any money to spend. The only time she ever tasted candy was when some boy or girl shared it with her. They did not share often for they had learned that she never had any to share with them.

"What for?" He grinned agitatedly. "Move closer. See. Don't move. You'll come again like this lots of times? I'll always give you a quarter. Don't move away. See, I'll sit here and you sit there—so."

Red-faced, Wanda sat still. After a while the man drew slightly away. What Wanda saw him do then startled her.

"You won't tell. Promise you won't tell!"

She shook her head. The quarter was bright and shiny in her hand as she ran rapidly down the staircase and out into the sunshine of the barnyard. She was on her way to the village for ice cream when Pete Anderson slunk out of the barn and, watching the windows of Wanda's home, disappeared around the corner.

The dining room at Wanda Fulton's home was square. There were two doors—one on the side opposite the windows and one leading back to the kitchen. Both doors and the frames supporting them were painted in oak with imitation graining. Two windows faced the barn at the side of the house. The vista between was broken by a decrepit hay rake with splintered shafts. It was used at night as a roost by the barnyard fowls who, departing noisily at break of dawn, left behind them their evidences of occupancy.

Mrs. Fulton sat in a straight oak chair at the foot of the table next to the kitchen; Wanda in a similar chair with her back to the window. Mr. Fulton, lean and smallish, sat at the head of the table. His chair, quite properly, as befitting his supremacy, possessed arms.

"You can have another slice of bread, Wanda," Mrs. Ful-

ton's voice was severe, with an undertone of both kindness and uncertainty.

Mr. Fulton cleared his throat.

"I don't want any more," Wanda said.

"I never knew you to refuse before. You eat so much."

Mr. Fulton reached quickly with his fork and speared a slice of bread.

"She's a growing girl, Thomas."

"Umph."

Her bread pudding finished, Wanda waited until her father shoved back his chair and creaked his way to the sitting room. She got up then and started scraping the dishes. Mrs. Fulton followed her husband.

The same every evening, Wanda was thinking—just the same, except that in the winter her mother would warn her to hurry so as not to keep the gas burning. Wanda lingered over the dishes in the kitchen. There was nothing else to do. She had read everything there was in the house except the evening paper and her father would mull over it until his head dropped while he still held it open before him. There was no use asking permission to go out. Refusal was certain.

When she finished the dishes she slowly climbed the stairs to her room. She wondered where to hide the six cents she had left of the quarter Pete Anderson had given her. She put the nickel and penny under her pillow. In the morning she would buy six marshmallow bananas and if she met any of the boys or girls she would give them away—all of them save one for herself. She undressed and crawled into bed. For four years she had gone to bed every night with a secret satisfaction. She had omitted her prayers. She was able to put that much over on Mr. Fulton anyway. To herself, Wanda always called her father "Mr. Fulton."

In bed she thought about what had happened in the hay loft. Mr. Anderson had asked her to come up there often. He had not hurt her. Mostly after he had pulled her dress up he just had looked at her and petted her with his hand. It was wrong, of course, and if she told on him he would get in trouble. He was a queer man. He had not tried to do what vaguely she knew men were supposed to do.

Wanda thought about old Professor Green. She had been over at his house many a time. Professor Green was a bachelor and lived alone. Wanda had met him on the street one

day as she trudged along with two books from the town's public library which was located in the basement of the Odd Fellows Hall.

The professor had planted himself square in front of Wanda. Solemnly he had reached for the two books and opened them. "Dear, dear, very poor stuff in truth. You like to read, Miss—Miss—"

"My name is Wanda."

"Yes, but your last name? I would not be so bold, my friend, as to presume to call you so familiarly."

Wanda, only eight at the time, did not understand the professor's words but some intuition made her feel that he was a friend and, she suspected, a great man.

"My papa's name is Fulton."

"And your mother's, Miss Fulton." He bowed slightly.

Wanda nodded and then added impulsively, "I read everything I can get."

It was the beginning of a friendship that had continued until about a year previously when one day she had gone to his house and found it deserted. Her friend had left without a word of good-bye. There was a bitterness in Wanda's heart and a lonely ache. If she had known what had happened to Professor Green it would have made her sad but she would have realized that he had not purposely deserted her. Relatives had come and spirited him away. Well intentioned, they had put him in an asylum for the feeble-minded. During the few years Wanda had known this unique, old man he had taught her to love books, formed for her the habit of reading which was to last throughout her life and had built up her mind and her vocabulary. Still a child, with many of the limitations of a child, Wanda often used words her parents did not understand and hence frowned upon. She missed him, lying in bed thinking about Pete Anderson.

A remembrance of the corn box made Wanda shake her head. Somehow it was like Mr. Anderson sitting near her, his face twitching. She would go back to the hay loft, however, because he was too silly to be afraid of and he would give her a quarter. She could treat her friends and they wouldn't keep calling her father and mother "tight."

She heard the hall floor creak outside. Her mother opened the door.

"Are you awake, Wanda?"

"Yes."

"You aren't sick, are you? You didn't seem hungry at supper."

"No, I'm all right."

"Good night then." Her mother bent and kissed her.

Wanda hesitated and then impulsively drew her mother's cheek down beside her own.

"I must go now, Wanda. Your father will miss me and scold."

Wanda released her. When the door shut she thought with pity of her mother. She sensed that her mother married to a kinder, bigger man would be quite different. She felt for the nickel and penny under the pillow. If her mother knew what she had done she would call it a sin. She would be horrified at the thought of her spending nineteen cents all in one afternoon.

Wanda had been graduated from the Bay Meadows Grammar School in the spring. Mr. Fulton did not believe in filling a female's head with the foolishness that he was convinced went on within the yellow brick walls of the township's new high school building. Stenography and typewriting he believed in because they were practical. Mr. Fulton had a great deal to say at home—he had nothing to say away from home—about being practical. It was practical to supply his table with the things he raised on his small farm on the edge of the village. Likewise, to keep hogs and make sausage and hams which was the only meat they ever ate, except occasionally a rooster or an old hen. It was practical for Wanda to pull weeds and milk their cow and deliver milk in the village. It was practical for Mrs. Fulton to sew all of Wanda's dresses and no one by any possible chance could mistake that they were home made. It was practical to lay aside for a rainy day. In fact, Mr. Fulton prepared for a cloudburst.

Unfortunately the grammar school did not teach stenography or typewriting. Mr. Fulton was unwilling to wait until Wanda would enter high school. So he had journeyed to Baltimore while she was attending grammar school and purchased a second hand typewriter. He employed a teacher and she spent her evenings learning to take dictation and to type.

Mr. Fulton was employed in a small shipyard. He kept hinting to Mr. Ferguson, his employer, that Wanda would make a good stenographer for his office. Mr. Ferguson agreed

but maintained that she was too young and needed more education. So Mr. Fulton decided to send Wanda to high school in the fall. As soon as he could persuade Mr. Ferguson to employ her she was to leave the halls of learning in favor of a desk in the shipyard's dingy office.

To all these practical plans Mrs. Fulton agreed. Thomas was a steady man, a good man and sensible. If Mrs. Fulton dreamed of a high school commencement and even college for her daughter, as she did, she kept such dreams locked within her own ample bosom.

At fourteen Wanda had a better grasp of stenography than most business school graduates. She possessed a quick, shrewd mind coupled with a colossal ignorance of many things. Her mother had taught her nothing of social relationships. The Fultons had no outside interests. Work and thrift comprised their whole world. Wanda had picked up some common knowledge at school and a great deal more from Professor Green and some from her playmates. They were wiser in the ways of the world than she. They knew of its prohibitions and were more conscious of the naughtiness of sin.

When Wanda climbed daily into the hay loft to see if Pete Anderson was waiting for her she had no twinges of conscience. She loaned him her body as she might have loaned anything else that she had that he would want. His twisted mind did not run toward thoughts of awakening her. To her it was all simply the matter of the quarter. He did not please her. She felt a slight repulsion when his hands caressed her body and pity at his dejection when she knew he was ready for her to leave.

One day when she climbed to the loft she found him fondling one of her playmates in similar fashion. He motioned excitedly for her to come over but she shook her head and descended the staircase. She did not return for several days. When she did at the usual hour he was there waiting for her. He asked her to fetch Mary, the girl who had been there before, promising to give each of them a quarter.

"I had better not. She might tell."

Pete Anderson's face changed. He grabbed Wanda's arm, hurting her. "Do you think she will tell? She mustn't tell! Tell me that she won't!"

"I don't know, mister. I'm afraid. Mary can't keep any-

thing to herself."

"Don't get her! Don't tell her you have ever been here!"

"Why do you like this, mister?"

"I never hurt you. I never have hurt any girl. Why do they persecute me? It's dangerous. I'll get caught! Here is the money. Run along. Don't come back. I'll not be here any more."

As Wanda turned to go he beckoned for her to come to him. She had the money in her hand and pretended she had not seen his motion. Half way to the village she felt sorry that she had not obeyed him. It was like stealing to take the money and not go back. She stopped in the road and turned. When she got to the barn he was gone.

She returned the next day and he was not there. Slowly she walked toward the village. There was a crowd in front of Mary's home. Wanda's heart sank. A grey shirted state policeman emerged from the front door yanking behind him Pete Anderson. Another policeman followed and cleared a path through the group about the gate. They passed close enough for Wanda to have been able to reach out and touch Pete Anderson. His face was greenish white, his teeth chattered with a clicking sound. Wanda ran home and climbed to the hay mow. She cried in pity. She could not altogether understand the look of hatred on the faces of the people as they stared at Pete Anderson. He had been gentle always with her. He had given her money. He had talked kindly to her.

It was that same night, which had turned very warm, that Wanda tossed about in her bed unable to sleep. She kept thinking about poor Pete Anderson. She crawled out of bed and gazed at the brown limb of an oak tree that curved itself across her window. A desire to be free of her small room possessed her. She dressed quickly and with a slight tug of fear reached for the tree limb. She clambered down to the ground. She would go swimming. No one would stop her. The thought of the cool water at the bay lapping about her body pleased her. She would not need a suit. No one would see her at night.

She walked the two miles to the beach slowly. She stopped in the shadow of a tree that grew near the shore. She heard voices. Some of the boys from the village were swimming. In the moonlight she could see their white bodies. She sat

down behind the tree and waited. After a long time they came out of the water and dressed. She took off her clothes. The boys moved away and, nude, she stepped gingerly to the beach. As she cautiously stuck one foot into the water she heard a snicker. She turned. Walter Derestine stood a few feet away from her, nude as she was. He grabbed his shirt and held it before him. Impulsively she doubled up as he approached her.

"Good thing I stayed when the others left." He stood grinning at her.

She held her hands against his body, holding him off. She looked at him without fear. He was taller than she, a rather pleasant looking boy of fifteen.

"I was going swimming," she explained foolishly.

"I know something better that we can do," he answered.

"Oh."

He pulled away her arms and kissed her. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. She broke away from him and snatched at her panties and slip. She ran behind a tree and put them on.

He called to her and hesitatingly she came back to where he was standing. He sat down and motioned to her to sit beside him. She looked at him coolly. He blushed as his eyes followed her gaze.

"You don't play fair." His voice choked slightly.

"What do you mean?"

"I let you see what you don't let me see."

"Oh."

"Won't you be nice to me, Wanda? No one will ever know. I love you, see." He put his arm about her.

She felt that she did not care what she did. She thought of Pete Anderson. She would not mind if he petted her in the same way. She sat still as his hands moved over her body.

"Take those off." He pointed.

She did as he told her but when he flung his body at her she fought him off. He pleaded in vain. Wanda knew that some things were dangerous. As he withdrew from her panting she sat expecting him to do as Pete Anderson had done. When he did he would let her go. He did not and pleaded with her. When he became rough and she was afraid he would force himself upon her she told him to sit up.

"I want to tell you something," she said. She explained

what he should do.

"Who told you about that?" he asked.

"A girl," she lied.

"You do it to me."

When Walter left her at the edge of the village he promised not to tell.

"If you do tell, my father will get after you and I'll never see you again."

"I won't. You will do it to me again?"

"Maybe," she answered vaguely.

Just a week before Wanda's seventeenth birthday she heard the doctor talking with her father. "Your wife has appendicitis. She should be operated on."

"How do you know she has that? She's had pains before and got over them."

"Better not risk it, Mr. Fulton. Better let her go to the hospital."

Mr. Fulton shook his head.

The next morning Mrs. Fulton got breakfast as usual but went back to bed after her husband left the house. Three days later they carried her to the hospital. They brought her back the next morning and laid her on the couch in the parlor. They hung black crepe on the door post.

The house filled with neighbors. Mrs. Fulton lay in a black coffin. Women kept coming into Wanda's room and talking to her. They petted her and commented in her presence about her. She escaped from them and climbed into the hay loft. She sat there all afternoon until she heard them calling her. She had had no lunch. They were calling her to supper. She was not hungry but she was afraid not to answer them. She was surprised how much food there was on the table. Someone had baked a big cake. She ate two slices. She hoped the neighbors would go home. She wanted to go into the parlor and see her mother. There were people there talking in subdued whispers. The preacher was there walking about with quiet importance, shaking hands and whispering penetratingly.

Wanda went up to her room and sat waiting. When it got late the people would go. She wanted to look once more at her mother. When she thought it was late she went down stairs. Three people were sitting in the parlor. It dawned upon her

that arrangements had been made so that there would be someone watching her mother all during the night. Wanda opened the front door softly and sat on the top porch step. A plan began to take shape in her mind. She sat for a long time. She made a momentous decision. She felt that a change had come over her. She was no longer afraid of the people in the parlor. She went in and looked at her mother. Her lips formed a silent "good-bye." When she turned to go one of the women tried to stop her and talk in a ghastly whisper. Wanda shook her head with a new dignity. She felt a sort of pitying scorn for the woman.

CHAPTER 2

On the evening before her seventeenth birthday Wanda stood listening inside the partly opened door. The house was still. Softly she stepped out into the hall and reached back for the suitcase. Her father was a light sleeper. If she awoke him all her plans would go to smash. She took a step and listened. Another and she was closer to her father's door. She must pass it to reach the head of the stairs. Slowly she moved abreast of it and then by. When she got to the head of the stairs she breathed a silent "Golly." She set her bag down in the hall and went into the dining room. She tip-toed to her mother's place—now hers—at the foot of the table and took a knife. The table already was set for breakfast. She wrinkled her nose. "In the morning I won't need it." She moved back to the hall and over to the sitting room.

The desk had a little drawer in front. She could see the small, black catch in the crack between the top of the drawer and the desk shelf. She inserted the knife and worked it up and down. The lock gave with a little click. She pulled the drawer open and removed a flat, tin box. Moving softly to the mantel-piece clock, she opened the glass case. There were two keys. She took the smaller one and returned to the desk. She inserted the key in the lock of the tin box. A fair sized stack of bills reposed beneath some papers. She listened and

then unbuttoned the front of her waist. She tucked the bills in beside her stomach. She started toward the hall and stopped. She tip-toed back to the clock. She felt the hands with her fingers. Five after ten.

In the hall she picked up her bag and opening the front door stepped out into the dark night. Rapidly she moved toward the road, feeling with her free hand the bills nestled against her stomach. "He'll look for the money first when he finds me gone," she thought.

She felt no misgivings about the money. She had toted too many bottles of milk, picked too many quarts of blackberries, washed too many dishes. "However much it is, he owes me more."

Reaching the road she turned north. It was ten miles to the next railroad station. It was too risky taking the train at Bay Meadows. She moved along briskly. The bag was not heavy. She heard a car coming and slid into the woods until it passed. It might be someone who knew her.

As she swung along the road, shifting the suitcase occasionally, she thought about her father's plans for her. He had called her into the sitting room when she had finished the dishes the evening after the funeral. Now that her mother was gone she must take her place. High school would have to be given up. She would do just as her mother had and keep house.

She asked about working for Mr. Ferguson. "I can take dictation real fast and type good, too."

"I know," her father answered. "Your teacher told me you were smart at it. Maybe," his features narrowed until his face took on the appearance of a fox, "maybe later, when Mr. Ferguson is willing, you could do the housework evenings and you wouldn't have to get to work until eight in the morning."

"Yes, sir." Wanda replied dutifully. She saw her father's eyes turn toward Mrs. Fulton's work basket. Every evening Mrs. Fulton had mended and sewed while her husband read the paper. Wanda's face put on a dumb expression. She slipped out of the room. Mr. Fulton cleared his throat. He started to call her and then thought better of it. "Time enough," he murmured, as he shifted closer to the light and busied himself with the paper.

It was then that Wanda decided definitely to put into exe-

cution the plan that she had decided upon when she had sat on the front porch while her mother's body rested in the parlor.

Along the road ahead gleamed the lights of a car. There was no place to hide. Wanda faced its approach with trepidation. It whizzed by. The new funeral shoes hurt her feet. She wished that she had thought to take her other shoes along. There was a hole in one sole but they would have been better for a ten-mile tramp. From around a curve in back a car shot its light upon her. The brakes whined beside her. She gritted her teeth. If they took her back they would have to carry her back.

"Going north, girlie?" The door swung open. She looked up. It was a large, closed car. The dashboard light shone on a man's vest and watch chain and across the upper part of his sharply pressed trousers.

"Let me help you with your suitcase." The man reached down and took the bag from Wanda's unresisting hand. "Come on. Jump in."

Wanda silently climbed in and sank into the seat. The man shifted the gears and the car moved pleasantly forward.

"Going far?" he asked in an offhand way.

"Only to the next town."

"Too bad. I could take you all the way to Philly. Stopping there tonight. Tough you aren't going that far."

Wanda wished that she could see the man's face. Her eyes took in the expensive-appearing dashboard.

"I'm going that far," she said slowly. "I'm going to New York."

"Gee, you girls get around these days." He reached back and switched on the dome light. Wanda rather liked the man's face. It was rounded and jolly looking. She knew he was generous in little things and without cruelty. Judging from the car and his clothes he had money.

"You're pretty. Had a death in your family, haven't you? Too bad. Well, it comes and it goes. Yes sir," he snapped the light off, "it comes and it goes. No one close, I hope."

"No, just a—a cousin."

"A cousin?"

Wanda felt that the man's brows knitted in the darkness of the car.

"A first cousin. Soon as I get to New York I'll take these

clothes off. The funeral was today."

"Older than you?"

"Yes—er, no, younger. He was only seventeen. How old do you think I am, mister?"

He switched the dome light on. "Hard to tell a girl's age nowadays. Bout—eighteen, I should say. Am I right?"

"Not quite. Nineteen." Wanda watched his face. It expressed no surprise. She hugged herself. I grew two years in a night, she thought.

The dome light was still on. The man gave only partial attention to the road. His eyes kept glancing over her. Wanda knew he was wondering how she looked inside of her clothes. She was glad that she had nice legs. Wanda was sure that the first pair of silk stockings she ever had owned showed them off nicely.

The man turned off the dome light. His hand reached for hers and she let him hold her small, cold hand.

"You must have a warm heart. Have you?"

"Maybe." Wanda was thinking fast. I must act nineteen from now on with everybody. That's the only way I can be a stenographer. "It wouldn't be so hard to be warm hearted to you," she added.

"Gee, that's swell. Hope you mean it." His hand reached to the far side of her lap and he pulled her closer to him. "Cozier, hey? Got many boy friends back there?" He motioned with his thumb toward the road behind them.

"Nope. Just been saving myself for you, mister."

"It's quaint, your calling me mister."

Wanda made a mental note that she shouldn't call men mister.

"As soon as I saw you," she said, "I knew I wasn't to call you missus."

"Ha, ha. You're a wise one. I'll bet." His hand slowly moved over toward her leg.

Wanda sighed slightly inwardly. She deliberately thought about the railroad fare she was saving. . . . They were all alike, she guessed.

His hand moved along the outside of her leg to her knee and then down over her silk stocking. The car swayed slightly.

"Look out," she warned.

The man straightened up. "I must not have had much experience driving with one hand, hey, baby? Say did you ever

hear that one about the fellow leaning against the lamp post and saying, 'oh boy, oh boy, oh boy' to himself?"

"Yes," Wanda answered truthfully, "a boy told me that just the other night."

"A boy huh? Say, it's a good one, ain't it? As tight as the banks. That's a good one. You know any good ones?"

"Oh, you tell them to me if you want."

"I guess I'd rather tell you about how lucky I think I am picking you up. How about a kiss?"

"If you want."

He bent quickly and kissed her. "Hard to do it right when you're driving." He squeezed her tight against him and held her. His mouth played with her hair as he kept his eyes on the road. He took his arm from around her body and his hand felt of her breasts and down the front of her dress. As she made no protest and did not withdraw from him he became more eager. His hand moved rapidly down to her skirt.

"I am afraid you will run into something," she said, trying to discourage him.

He turned the car to the side of the road and stopped. He took her in both of his arms and kissed her. His mouth moved down her body. His hands kept caressing her.

"You will let me take you to my hotel in Philadelphia, won't you?" His voice was excited.

She thought rapidly. If she went he would surely give her some money. She would not like it but that was the way to make money fast. Would he know that she was a virgin? She wished that she weren't. He thought she was experienced and had had lots of boys. She was a little ashamed that she was a virgin.

"Won't you please?" he pleaded.

"Maybe."

"Promise. I'll—. If you want pay."

Wanda was silent.

"I'll give you ten dollars if you will."

"You had better get going."

"You will, won't you?"

"Yes," she said and was angry at herself because she blushed.

The man drove very fast. Wanda sat silently beside him. She was frightened. She wanted advice. She wished that she could ask him but she was ashamed. Would he take care of

her or would he expect her to look out for herself? Maybe when they got to the hotel she could tell him that she never had let anyone before and he would tell her what to do to protect herself. This would be different than it was with Pete Anderson and with Walter. She wished that it were over. Maybe, if it hadn't been for Mr. Anderson, she wouldn't be willing. Men all wanted a girl that way. They didn't seem to think it was wrong for them. She guessed it was all right. At any rate there was the ten dollars.

Gee, nearly fifty times what Mr. Anderson used to give her. He meant it, though. Wanda sank back. She was glad that the man was too busy driving to molest her further. She thrilled to the speed that they were making.

Wanda woke up at the sound of a man's voice. They were in the city and a policeman was holding the door open.

"Your left light is out."

"Oh," the man answered nervously. "It must have just gone out."

"That's what they all say." The officer moved toward the front of the car. He tapped the headlight with the palm of his hand. It flashed bright.

"Wire worked loose. You can go." The officer waved the car on.

Wanda saw the hands on the wheel trembling. "What scared you?"

"Him. When he stopped me. Thought it was on account of you. That damn Mann Act. Say, have you ever been to a hotel with a man before?"

"No," Wanda answered, still not understanding just what had frightened the man so much.

"I was thinking. Hell, I'd like to, you understand, but I'm forty-eight and you're only nineteen. I've got to stop at the Franklin because a man is to phone me. It's important. They will be wise. Damn it all."

Wanda was silent.

"Gee, I'm sorry, baby. You are a swell kid and were nice to me down the road. Are you broke?"

Wanda surreptitiously felt the wad of bills beneath her dress.

"Sort of," she lied.

"Here." He handed her a ten dollar bill. "Where you want to go?"

"To New York."

"You mean the Pennsylvania Station."

"Yes, but I can get out here and find it."

"It's just a block or two out of the way. I'll take you."

In front of the station he handed her bag to a red cap. "This young lady wants the New York train. Here," he handed the porter fifty cents, "take care of her. Damn," he looked at Wanda, "I've half a mind—"

A taxi honked behind him.

"So long." He waved. "Hope we meet again."

She found that she had an hour to wait for the New York train. The porter left her, promising to return. She sat on one of the long wooden benches. She saw a women's room to the left of her. She went in, taking her bag. She found a big chair isolated in a corner. She walked to it and, sitting down, pulled the bag onto the arms of the chair. It shielded her. She extracted the money from her waist and counted. There was one hundred and eighty-six dollars. She shoved it back in her waist again. From the suitcase she took out her mother's pocketbook. In it she placed the ten dollar bill the man had given her. She could live a long time on almost two hundred dollars.

Wanda's train pulled into New York at five o'clock. She followed the passengers up the stairs to the great steel and stone room. She set her bag down wondering which way to turn. A porter made a dive for her bag but she shook her head and lifted it. She turned to the nearest stairs and climbed to Eighth Avenue. Another porter motioned to her. "Damn nuisances," she mumbled. She spied a cafeteria on the opposite corner. She would get a big breakfast. No longer could a penurious old skinflint limit her breakfasts to oatmeal and skimmed milk, dry bread and Rio coffee.

There was a shelf beside the window. She set her bag down. She watched a man who lifted up a tray and helped himself to silver and a paper napkin. She followed his example. She piled her tray with food and she ate every scrap of it. She felt gloriously free and happy. She would find a hotel and leave her bag. She would buy some pretty clothes that would make her look still older and she would get a job. She would find out how to lose her virginity safely. Her face fell slightly. She wished that that were over; she even wished a little that men were not necessary at all in her plans. She wouldn't

worry about them now. Better the men with their restless, persistent hands than Bay Meadows. She wasn't going back. This—Wanda's eyes roamed over the shining restaurant and out to the street—was her home now. She had been lucky. Made ten dollars for nothing. She liked this—the excitement and go of it. She wasn't afraid and—golly, that had been a good breakfast.

CHAPTER 3

Leaving the cafeteria, she started south. On the next corner was a hotel with a sign advertising rooms for a dollar a day. She entered and registered. The bell boy swung open her door and stood aside to permit her to enter first. She felt a little proud to be the recipient of such politeness.

When he left, Wanda locked the door and removed her dress. She fingered dubiously her home made white cotton slip and pants. She removed them, wishing that there were a full length mirror. She had never examined herself carefully all over. She washed vigorously, wetting a good deal of the floor. She tilted the dresser mirror for glimpses of herself. She had read once that a perfect form did not permit daylight to be seen between the thighs when a girl stood with her legs together. She glanced down and felt assured. She decided it was pretty the way her legs sloped from her hips to her knees and she liked the slender, firm curve of her lower leg.

She felt that she never had had time to think of her body before. "It's good," she nodded her head, talking to herself. "I've nice knees, small and cute looking and my belly is a round dumpling and my breasts are muffins with little knobs in the center. I'm going to keep this body clean as a whistle and buy swell clothes and—" looking at the cotton underthings— "new pants and such. I want a nifty hat that maybe will show my black bangs in front and—golly, I'll slay the whole world."

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Wanda was sitting in an employment office. She had been in New York for two weeks. The two weeks had brought no job but they had brought other things: new clothes, a lip stick, rouge and a certain polish. In a room of possibly twenty girls, Wanda stood out as the prettiest. There was no trace left of "country" about her. She had observed and profited during the two weeks. She did not want to make mistakes. Instinctively she realized the difference between cheap prettiness and quality. Her black, inquiring eyes did not miss much. She studied every woman she had a chance to and many of the men. She noticed what they wore and how they wore it, what they ate and how they ate it, what they said and how they said it.

Covertly she studied the girl sitting next to her. "Fairly bright but too quick to sneer at people. Spoiled her face. Suspicious of other people's motives. Not enough confidence in herself so she bolsters up her nerve by wearing a half sneer on her face. Well, here goes—"

"Rotten, this hunting for a job, isn't it?"

The girl gave Wanda a quick, suspicious glance. The lines about her mouth quivered and hesitated. Suddenly they relaxed.

"I don't mind it so much. Only been out a week. My last boss tried to work me to death. I quit. I'll get something. I've got a technique about getting jobs."

"I wish you would teach me," Wanda said very humbly.

Again the suspicious look and then cautiously, "Don't try and kid *me*."

"I'm not, honest. Just graduated from business college. Haven't worked any yet."

"Don't use your school recommendation. They don't pay nothing when you are a beginner. Use a business recommendation."

"But I haven't any."

"N-o? They are easy to get. I know a guy that will give you a dandy for five dollars and if they call him up he jabbers swell about how good you are."

"Can you give me his address?"

"Certainly I can. Here, tell him May Sweet sent you over."

"Thanks, May, I will."

May glanced at Wanda's legs and shrugged. "Go at lunch time, kid, and he'll feed you. About twelve-thirty."

"My name's Wanda, May."

"Pleased to know you."

"Where do you live?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"I'm staying at a hotel. I don't like it very much."

May was silent for a few moments. "Damn it all," she exploded abruptly. "I can't help liking you. I've got a one room and bath apartment. It ain't much. Want to go see it?"

"I would like to."

"O. K. It's twenty minutes from here."

The room was about thirty feet square with a window that looked out upon a court and the roofs of a low row of houses in the back. A yellow net curtain with cretonne over drapes that blended well adorned the window. There were five pictures on the wall, two crayons and three etchings. There was a good sized table, two large and two small chairs, a smaller table with a radio on it and a screen. Behind the screen was crowded a tiny sink, a small ice box and a gas stove. A large closet contained a Murphy bed that pulled out. A door opened to a bathroom that was so compact that when May entered it Wanda stood in the doorway to avoid crowding her.

"The best fellow I ever had fixed this room up for me. He drew those pictures. He gave me the rug too, a real oriental."

"Was he an artist?"

"He wanted to be. He—. Oh, why talk about him. I pay sixty-five a month rent. Would you want to share expenses with me? We could try it for a week and see if we get along."

"Yeah, sure. I'll move today if you say so."

"Be O. K. by me."

"I've always wanted a girl friend. I'll do my share toward being decent, never fret about that."

Wanda kissed her and left.

Mr. Wilcox, who conducted an agency for street vendors' novelties, was very willing to issue Wanda a recommendation.

"I clear a little on the side besides helping the girls out." He winked coquettishly at Wanda. "Hey, Betty," he called to a girl in a small outer office.

She came in, note book in hand.

"This is Miss Fulton. Wanda," he purred the name. "Write one of those about her having worked here two years. Sounds big, you know," he turned toward Wanda, "Wilcox Importing Company. If they phone I'll tell them that you are very satis-

factory. I treat them right, don't I, Betty?"

"Yes, Mr. Wilcox."

"Especially if they treat me right."

Betty leered at Wanda and with studied care closed the door as she returned to her own office.

Mr. Wilcox settled more comfortably in his swivel chair and tried to probe Wanda. In his middle forties, with a fat stomach and a head made ridiculous by flabby, outstanding ears, Wilcox adopted a playfully boyish—almost kittenish—manner. Each question or remark was more personal than that which preceded it. He was coming to sex just as quickly as Wanda's replies and attitude permitted.

Wanda was non-committal in her replies. She thought him repulsive. At the same time she did not want the five dollars she had given him to be wasted. She determined that if a prospective employer telephoned him his answers should be helpful. Besides she wanted the satisfaction of having him invite her to lunch. He did and she accepted. Over the dessert he suggested that they spend an evening together.

"That would be fine. I would love to."

"Good. How about tonight?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I have a date with May for tonight."

"Break it."

"I wish I could. No—" as if debating the matter—"it wouldn't do."

"When?"

"I'll tell you. You're a good sport. When I land a job I'll phone you and you can take me out."

"For a good time?" His eyes grew small and piggish looking.

"You've got to help me get the job."

"Girl, if you mean what I mean I'll tell them you are the best stenographer in New York."

"I believe you, Mr. Wilcox. I think you are the kind that would treat a girl right. I can tell when a man's a real man. Maybe I had better start looking for that job. The sooner I get it, you know." Her eyes promised a great deal.

Mr. Wilcox called importantly for his check. He left two quarters for a tip on the plate, shoving it carelessly over in Wanda's direction. As they left the table, Wanda preceding him, his hand slipped back to the plate. One of the quarters found its way back into his pocket. Wanda, gazing into a wall

mirror, wrinkled her nose. When he took her arm she responded to the pressure of his fingers by squeezing them briefly against her side.

Wanda swung along, having decided to walk to her hotel. She was pleased over her interview with Mr. Wilcox. She hadn't thought that men could be so easy. Men were simply children. All you had to do was to hold out something sweet in front of them and they would do what you wanted them to do. You didn't even have to let them have the sweet. Wanda wondered how far a girl should go with making promises that she didn't intend to fulfill. She decided that she never would definitely promise to let a man have her unless she meant it. She had promised Mr. Wilcox a date after she secured a position. A date, yes, but not the kind he had permitted himself to imagine.

Swinging along, conscious of men's admiring glances, Wanda felt very much alive. She wondered what would happen if she answered some of the men's glances and permitted herself to be picked up. If she were without money she would do it. It might be fun. She speculated on how May met her artist friend. He must have been interesting. Poor kid, she probably couldn't hold him. Underneath May was a good sort. There were a lot of questions Wanda wanted to ask her. Tips about getting a job. More particularly, how she protected herself when she kept men all night in her apartment. Wanda felt there was a good deal May could teach her.

Wanda got her job. It was in a wholesale jewelry house on Maiden Lane. There were ten girls in the large room where Wanda sat before her typewriter. There was a buzzer connected with a glass enclosed case that had numbers in it. Her number was eight. There would be a buzz and all the girls would look up. A little arrow snapped to one of the numbers. The first time it showed eight Wanda mumbled, "It's up to you, Wanda." The middle-aged man who dictated twelve letters to her was fortunately a slow thinker. Wanda glued her mind to her task. She came back to her own desk with a headache but with the proper hieroglyphics in her note book.

Nine five dollar bills and a little change—Wanda gazed at them soberly. It was Saturday afternoon and she was alone in the apartment. It did not seem like much for all the

effort. Suppose she stayed with the jewelry firm. The highest paid woman employee was Mr. Hummel's secretary. Sixty a week was the most such a position would pay and there were ten hard working girls in the outer office envying the girl who got that much. She put on airs and considered herself superior to the ten hack stenographers who weren't secretaries. You couldn't furnish an apartment even as well as May's was, on sixty or sixty-five dollars. The one Oriental rug must have cost a month of sixty or sixty-five dollar pay envelopes. About one girl in a thousand in New York could buy Orientals and maintain a nice apartment on her salary, and most of them had to wait until middle age for that. At the best it was too slow and too much effort for what you got out of it. Besides, Wanda wasn't particularly interested in other people's jewelry.

She flipped her cigarette out of the window. "There is but one answer," she said aloud, "and here it is." She ran her hands up along her legs and thighs. She pulled forward the yoke of her dress and looked down at the silk slip that hugged her breasts. She stuck her hands in front of her and gazed at them. "I can rent these to sit up and pound a typewriter all day for a few dollars a week or I can rent the rest of me for that much a night. My hands are public. The most disagreeable men see them. They come in contact with all sorts of things, smeary typewriter ribbons and what not. Then I wash them and forget it. I must look at my body in the same way. I'll say, 'it isn't me—it isn't mine.' Then when it's over I'll take a good bath and forget it."

CHAPTER 4

Wanda pulled the finished letter out of her machine. She straightened her back. It did ache. The jewelry firm certainly believed in getting its money's worth out of the office girls. Wanda looked them over. Were there any of them that knew things about New York that she didn't? Most of them dressed very well for the money they received. They probably lived

at home and spent all they made outside of car fare and lunches on clothes. There was one girl that Wanda knew did not live at home. She dressed the most expensively of any of them. There must be a man there. Wanda decided to cultivate the girl. It might be advantageous. The call box buzzed. The arrow snapped and trembled to number eight. Wanda grabbed her note book. The girl nearest the door leading to the men's office smirked as Wanda passed. "Meow," Wanda cooed sweetly over her shoulder.

She entered a large room containing fifteen desks behind which sat fifteen men. "Not a thrill in a room full," she thought. She looked at the three men to whom she was assigned as stenographer. One of them motioned to her. She groaned inwardly. "The worst of the lot. Every letter a whole book."

"I'm afraid we have a lot of dictation today, Miss Fulton. I'm going on the road." He was very businesslike as were all the men. Fifteen men in one office with the chief clerk, old eagle eye, pompous and brisk, in back where he could see them all; it was good policy to be strictly business.

All the girls in Wanda's office had put their covers on their machines and left. At six o'clock Mr. Hummel's secretary passed by with a curt nod. Wanda still plunked the keys. She became aware that Mr. Hummel was standing beside her.

"Right at it I see, young lady."

Wanda looked up. Why not? If she could interest him it might be to her advantage. "Oh, I don't mind hard work. I want to get ahead, Mr. Hummel." She shoved her chair back slightly so her legs would show. She caught an awakened interest in his eyes.

He moved in front of her and bent over, reaching for one of the letters. "Mr. Winston's dictation, I see."

She bent slightly forward and then looked up into his face. She grinned knowingly. He colored. She purposely let him understand that she was aware of the direction his eyes had taken. Carelessly her hand moved over the front of her dress.

He stood uncertainly before her. She knew that he was debating the dangers connected with inviting an employee to dinner.

"I only have two more letters and then little Wanda will get herself something to eat."

"Yes, you must be hungry. I would like to invite you to dinner but the other young ladies might comment on that."

"It's a good thing they have all left, isn't it, Mr. Hummel? It is a shame the way some girls can't keep from telling everything they know."

"And—er, can you?"

"I'm a lone wolf, Mr. Hummel." Wanda started typing again. She kept her eyes on the letter in front of her.

His hand caressed her hair. "It's terribly black, isn't it?"

"It's blue black, Mr. Hummel."

"Beautiful. You don't mind my admiring it, I hope."

"No, I don't mind *your* admiring it." She glanced up at him, tilting her head sideways.

His hand in her hair trembled slightly. He kissed her, a quick kiss.

"Oh, Mr. Hummel."

"You—you liked that?"

"I shouldn't. I'm afraid though that I did. I think you are so nice."

Mr. Hummel's face beamed. He straightened his shoulders. "Come here," he said masterfully.

Wanda slowly got up. She stood timidly before him. He wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. "I'm going to kiss you again."

"Oh—oh, Mr. Hummel." Wanda did not know whether she felt like laughing at him or kicking him.

He bent Wanda back and kissed her with a flourish. "My," Wanda thought, "Hollywood could take lessons from this." Mr. Hummel's hands were moving over her body. He was fast forgetting his masterfulness in plain panting desire.

"You had better let me finish the letters, Mr. Hummel." Wanda pushed him away. "Now, sit down and wait. You have me almost swooning. No man ever kissed me like that before. I guess they didn't know how." As she firmly sat him in a chair she closed her eyes as though she were completely overcome.

"You—you gather yourself together. Finish the letters if you must. I won't touch you until you are through."

"You had better not," she panted. "You make a girl forget everything. You see, Mr. Hummel, I am a—a virgin. I'm so frightened."

"You mustn't be. Write the letters and then we will go to

dinner."

Wanda sat at her machine. She started typing and then hastily pulled the letterhead out of the typewriter. In the middle of the letter she had written, "the damn fool."

She inserted a new sheet and finished the letter. "I'll get my coat."

They ate at a hotel. When dessert was served Mr. Hummel excused himself to telephone. Wanda sipped her coffee, her brows knit in thought. She was trying to decide what to do about Mr. Hummel. Would she gain more by holding him off? The main thing was, she would make him pay for it. She determined on her policy. She would stress the importance of her surrender to him. She would pretend that he completely swept her off her feet. She would make him do a lot of pleading first and in the course of it she would work him for either a gift or a raise.

He came back to her table with a satisfied smirk on his face. "You like me a little, Wanda?"

"More than any man I ever met in my life," she answered, looking up at him with adoration.

"Then I want you to trust me. I've made arrangements with a friend of mine to go to her house, a Mrs. Jones. We," his eyes narrowed, "are to have a room there to ourselves where we can sit and talk. Now I'll call for the check and get a taxi."

"But, Mr. Hummel, I'm afraid I don't understand."

"You are going to trust me, aren't you?"

"I do trust you but—"

"But you don't trust yourself? Is that what you mean?"

"Maybe." She lowered her eyes and then looked up. "I'm afraid I misunderstood you. I am sure," a relieved note came into her voice, "that you aren't planning anything wrong."

Mr. Hummel looked uncomfortable. "I—why not wait until we get to the room before discussing that? You will go with me, won't you?"

"If you mean just to talk as you said I'll go but I want your promise not to, you know. I couldn't go otherwise, really."

"Don't you care enough for me, Wanda? Think how I thrilled you at the office."

"Oh, I know you did, terribly. You see though I never have and even if I—. No I had better not say it."

"Say what, my dear?"

"I just can't help it, Mr. Hummel, I've fallen in love with you completely."

"You dear, sweet girl. Now you must trust me and not worry. You come with me and everything will be all right."

"And you'll promise not to—to touch me?"

"You'll let me kiss you, won't you?"

"I suppose so. I'm afraid I want your kisses. It mustn't be anything else though. You promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

Wanda smiled trustingly and stood up.

They taxied to a respectable looking four-storied brown stone house in the West Fifties. A maid opened the door.

"I want to speak to Mrs. Jones," Hummel announced.

"Yes, sir, step right in here. I'll tell her."

They entered a richly furnished room. Mrs. Jones came in. She oozed confidence. Wanda studied her and liked her. She had a feeling that she would have further dealings with Mrs. Jones. The maid brought in some wine. They chatted about the latest musical comedy on Broadway.

When Wanda set her glass down Mrs. Jones announced, "I'll show you the room."

On the stairs Wanda saw Mr. Hummel slip Mrs. Jones a bill. The room was on a second floor back. It was nicely furnished with a chesterfield, several chairs and tables. The walls were covered with silk material. A low wide bed and dresser could be glimpsed through an alcove and a door partly opened revealed a bathroom. Mrs. Jones excused herself and closed the hall door. Wanda sat down in a wing chair.

"Don't sit there. Come over and join me on the sofa. We can talk better."

As Wanda stood up Hummel reached his arms about her. He kissed her. "Kiss me too, dear. There, you are so adorable."

"Don't touch me there please, Mr. Hummel. Remember you promised."

"Hasn't anybody ever?"

"No, nobody ever."

"But you have been kissed, haven't you?"

"Yes, some boys have but it never meant much until you kissed me at the office."

He kissed her hard and squeezed his body against hers. She broke away from him and ran to the chesterfield.

"Wanda," he panted as he sat beside her, "you must let me have you. I'm going to take this dress off."

"No, no, you mustn't."

"Please, Wanda."

She reached for her handkerchief and buried her eyes in it. She shook her shoulders slightly.

"Why are you crying, dear?"

Her shoulders kept shaking. He tried to pull the handkerchief away. She resisted his efforts. "If you really love me, Wanda, you wouldn't think about yourself."

"I do love you madly. I never thought I would think about doing anything like this. Will it hurt?"

"No, of course not. I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Come now, just close your eyes and let me take you in my arms."

"You love me too?"

"Of course I do."

"And you'll prove it by taking care of me?"

"What do you mean? You mean—money?"

She threw her arms around him. "Yes, I'm so poor. I have a mother back home that I have to send money to. I owe room rent and it's so hard. You don't know how wonderful it is to feel that I have someone now who loves me and to whom I can come with my troubles. You will take care of me?"

"Darling! Of course I will. I'll raise your salary. I'll fix it some way."

"You promise you will raise it quite a bit, dar—ling?"

"Yes, I promise. I have a plan. You won't regret it."

"You make me so happy. Something told me the very first time I saw you in the office that you were generous and a big man. I'm so glad I can give myself, a pure girl, to you."

He knelt before her and took off her shoes. He reached for the top of her stockings.

"Wait, dear, you'll tear them. Wait just three minutes and then follow me."

She closed her eyes as he stumbled toward her. She bit her lip as she felt pain. She hated him. She went into the bathroom. It was hard to go back. She looked into the bathroom mirror. "It was worse than you expected, Wanda, but you've made the plunge now. You are learning a trade," she kept thinking. She knew there would be others, more important men.

Mr. Hummel picked up his vest that lay on the floor and

his coat which had been flung across a chair. He looked at his watch. "A quarter to one," he said aloud. "I must go now. Sorry I can't stay all night this time. Have to be getting home."

He dressed and kissed her. She put both arms around his neck and pressed his head against her bosom. "Still love me?"

"More than ever. Wish I could stay. You had better rest here tonight. See you at the office."

She nodded and he was gone. She got up and ran water into the tub. She scrubbed herself very thoroughly. She was drying herself when she heard a knock on the door. "Who is it?"

"Mrs. Jones, dear. May I come in?"

"Yes, do. I'm taking a bath."

Mrs. Jones stood in the doorway. "He said you were staying until morning."

"No, I'm leaving as soon as I get dressed. I let him think I was staying so that I wouldn't have to go out with him."

"I understand. I didn't think you came here because you liked him. I hope that he was liberal."

"He didn't give me anything *yet*."

"Be sure and collect, dear. A body is like an automobile. You can't afford to forget the wear and tear."

"You're right, Mrs. Jones. I'm glad you came up. I am new in New York. Maybe you could tell me where to get hold of men."

"Put that towel down, my dear. I want to see you. Turn around. Uh huh. Now face me again. How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"Best tell the truth, honey."

"I did add a year. I'm eighteen. Don't I look that old?"

"No, but you may be. Where are your folks?"

"In—"

"Wait. They don't live in New York or in the suburbs?"

"No."

"That's all I want to know. I'll be glad to take your phone number and call you."

CHAPTER 5

Unconsciously Wanda grabbed at the iron loop of the subway car as she felt the quick lurch of the brakes. The train came to a grating stop. She peered out of the window at the grey murk that exists between stations. She had hoped that she would get to the apartment in time to dress before May came in from her dinner. She did not want to listen to May's comments when she told her that she was going to dinner and goodness knows what else with some of Mrs. Jones' clientele. There was to be some sort of a party. Wanda wondered what it and the men, especially her particular man, would be like.

May was not at the apartment. Wanda dressed quickly. She was due at a private club at seven o'clock. After a shower, a change of panties and a scribbled note to May, Wanda arrived only a few minutes late. She gave Mrs. Jones' name to the doorkeeper and was admitted. A tall, blonde girl, very stately, asked Wanda her name.

"I'm head girl," she explained, "when Mrs. Jones isn't present. There are ten of us girls, including yourself. We are to be auctioned off. I don't know who will be lucky enough to get the older men. You are fortunate to get in on this. These boys are important. It looks as if it were big money."

"How do you mean auctioned off and that the girls who get the older men are lucky?"

"Mrs. Jones told me you were new at the game. Older men always pay better. These guys are raising a campaign fund for the coming election. As I understand it, they have hit on a new stunt. Instead of taxing each man so much for this fund they are staging a party. The men are upstairs now. There is to be a banquet and at the end of it partners are to be auctioned off. After a lot of drinking they figure that the men will bid high for the girls that please them most. The money raised is to be put in this campaign fund they are after.

"There will be an envelope at each place with a hundred dollars in it. You are to give fifty back to Mrs. Jones. Understand?"

The gorgeously dressed girls that lounged about in a women's dressing room took Wanda's breath away. The girls were of distinct types. Each one was carefully gowned and groomed to emphasize her particular personality. Wanda realized that her black silk, seventeen-fifty dress looked like a house dress by comparison to the gowns the other girls wore.

There was a knock on the door. A man came in. He held up his hand for silence. "They are ready for you to go upstairs. All of the upper floors have been engaged for the party. You are to take the first empty seat you find as you go in."

He stood aside and the head girl, whose name was Adeline, led the procession. Wanda felt much the same as a debutante at her first party.

Ten men were seated at a long table with an empty chair between each place. The girls paraded into the room like mannikins. The men stood up with an almost audible catching of the breath. The girls took their places in order. Wanda found herself between the youngest man present, a snappily dressed chap, and one of the older men who patted her knee as soon as she was seated.

The dinner began with oysters on the half shell. There were a dozen courses and champagne quickly made its appearance. The older man, next to Wanda, kept plying her with the champagne. She did not want to become intoxicated. She took small sips and made each glass last as long as possible.

As course followed course, the corks popped more frequently. The talk became louder, the stories bolder, the men's hands freer. Wanda kept removing the older man's hand that continually came toward her under the table cloth.

The younger man was devoting most of his time to the girl on the other side of him. He turned toward Wanda once and placed his hand in her lap. He appealed to her and she did not appear to notice his hand.

The chairman at the head of the table rapped for order. "We now come, ladies and gentlemen, to an important part of our program. You men know what we are here for."

"Come here." He motioned to Adeline. "I am going to put Adeline up here on the table where everybody can see her. What am I bid?"

Adeline smiled.

"I'll bid a hundred," the man who had been sitting next to her reached over the table and patted her ankle.

"Don't be a piker!" a man at the foot of the table chirped. "I'll make it five hundred."

"A thousand," the first man said quietly.

The chairman waited. No one bid. He bent over and whispered into the ear of the bidder. The man nodded. "Fred has voluntarily said he would make it five thousand, boys."

There were cheers. The chairman set the next girl on the top of the table. A man who had been seated next to her started with a five hundred dollar bid. She was finally auctioned off to a man several places down the table for fifteen hundred.

When it came Wanda's turn the older man who was sitting next to her would not let her get up. "I'm buying her, boys, unless someone wants to pay more than ten thousand."

Wanda grinned friendly. "Selfish pigs, every one of them," she thought. She wondered how late it was. How many dreaded hours lay ahead? As his trembling fingers clutched at her she thought of blackberry thorns scratching her flesh in Bay Meadows and of Pete Anderson. There was no danger of any policemen handling Mr. Ashmore roughly.

When she dressed the next morning to go to her fifty dollar a week job, she had the one hundred dollars in the unopened envelope and an additional one hundred. Also the promise that Mr. Ashmore would provide an apartment and a personal maid.

During her lunch hour the next day Wanda opened a bank account and made an initial deposit of one hundred dollars. She made up her mind to never let a week go by without depositing something. That evening she took May to a Broadway show. They had orchestra seats well down in front. A nice supper followed and they returned to the apartment.

"You certainly are good to me, Wanda," May said wistfully.

"It makes me feel better to do something for somebody," Wanda answered. "It seems as if you have to be so hard and scheming to get along in this silly world. It's nice to have someone with whom you can be just what I hope I really am underneath."

"I don't know what I'm going to do when you move, dear, and take Mr. Ashmore's apartment. I'll miss you a lot."

"Don't be silly. We'll see a lot of each other. I'll spend some time with you here. You can visit with me. He can't object to

my having a girl friend. Besides, don't be forgetting that I am going to find you a Romeo. Gee, I'm tired."

Wanda stood gazing out of the window of an apartment on Central Park West. Mr. Ashmore stood beside her.

"I hope you are pleased, my dear?"

"Yes, I am. I think it was especially kind of you to have all those lights lit for me."

"What? Oh, the park lights. They are quite pretty."

"Jewels laid on black velvet." Wanda spoke more to herself than to Mr. Ashmore. "New York is lovely sometimes—if you have money."

"I thought of making an arrangement whereby I would care for the rent and—shall we say a hundred dollars a week to you personally."

Wanda's face registered proper appreciation.

"We must have a little talk." Mr. Ashmore waved Wanda to a straight back chair while he sank in a cushioned rocker. "You must resign from your position, of course."

Wanda walked over to Mr. Ashmore and stood behind his chair. She put her arms around his neck and laid her cheek against his. His arms reached for her and she slid onto his lap. "I want to ask you a favor, dear."

"Yes?"

"About my job, I mean. I would like to keep on working. You will be away all day and it will be kind of lonesome sitting here waiting for you."

"What do you make a week?"

"Only fifty dollars but Mr. Hummel has promised me a raise."

"I see." Mr. Ashmore's eyes narrowed. "I prefer that you give up your position." There was a note of finality in his voice.

"I was thinking of you, dear." Wanda dug herself more closely into his lap, squirming a bit in the operation. "I think I will be more alert and entertaining if I don't just sit at home and decay."

"Suppose I get you a position in another office?"

"That will be all right. Just so long as you permit me to work."

"You may stay for the time being."

"It's a promise?"

"I always keep my word. Yes, you may work if you desire."

Wanda closed the door after Mr. Ashmore. She glanced at the platinum wrist watch that he had given her to celebrate her installation in the apartment. "A quarter to twelve. Got rid of him early. A bath and then I'll look the dump over."

She snapped on the bathroom lights and stood in the doorway gazing at the dull black terra cotta walls, the deeper black of the tub, bowl and washstand; the golden faucets and light fixtures and the glass enclosed shower. The floor was of black and cream tiles with dark red rugs before the tub and washstand. She adjusted the sprays to the right temperature and with a pleased sigh moved into the running streams. They spanked her from all directions. She lathered with the French soap and then turned the water colder. "Golly," she yelled and pranced about.

Shivering, she stepped onto the red bathmat, digging her toes into its deep softness. She rubbed herself with a big, heavy, Turkish towel. Still nude, but dry, she wandered into the long living room with its three windows facing the park. Sitting before the baby grand piano she determined to learn to play. She knew she had a rather good voice and it would be nice to be able to accompany herself. She went over to the Louis Fourteenth desk, picturing herself adding up columns of figures. A hundred dollars a week. She could save at least fifty.

There was a dining room with mahogany table, buffet and china closet with dishes that somehow looked unused. A large, blue rug covered most of the floor. The walls were also blue, a deeper shade. "Makes *me* blue, this room," she thought, and swung the door into the white tiled kitchen. Back of the kitchen was a small maid's room with its own adjoining bath.

Somewhat reluctantly she entered the large bedroom. Grey carpeted floor, cream yellow walls, a large, low bed with mirrored back and baseboards, a long, low bureau, a dressing table, a chaise longue with many, small, lace covered pillows; Wanda wrinkled her nose, "Expensive but I don't like it."

CHAPTER 6

Wanda opened the door of the apartment with trepidation. It was a quarter to one. She switched on the lights and hurried through the rooms. She sighed with relief. Evidently Mr. Ashmore had not called. She had been worried about it. Mr. Hummel surreptitiously had handed her a note as he passed her desk asking her to meet him at Mrs. Jones'. Mr. Ashmore had been with her the evening before and she was almost certain that a night or two would elapse before his return. Nevertheless there was a chance that he might show up. She was grateful that Mr. Hummel had left her a little after midnight.

She was in the shower when the telephone rang. Dripping wet, she answered it. "Hello, Wanda, were you in bed?"

"No, I was about to crawl in."

"Yes, you had better not stay up any longer. I may call tomorrow night."

"I'm glad of that. I wish you would let me know when you are coming?"

"I can't always tell when I can get away. I expect you there, you know, when I can."

"It's that I might go to a movie. If I know you are coming of course I will be here waiting for you."

"That's the trouble with your working. If you weren't you could go in the afternoons instead of keeping me waiting until you choose to get in."

"Why don't you run over now?"

"No. I'm not even sure about tomorrow night. If I do come I trust you will be there."

"Oh yes, of course I will. I won't budge out of the apartment. Be sure and come if you possibly can."

"Very well. Good night." The receiver clicked.

"Damn him, does he expect me to sit around night after night waiting for him?"

"So," Mr. Hummel finished as Wanda sat beside his desk, "you are to start right in here as my private secretary."

She went back to her old desk and gathered together her few personal belongings. Out of the corner of her eyes she noted the air of animosity. She well knew how gossip was whispered about an office. From now on the girls would hate her. They would be self righteous about it. In the washroom they would indignantly tell one another that they weren't the kind that permitted familiarity from their boss. They would soon show him his place. Sniff and shake their heads and gloatingly relate what was transpiring within Mr. Hummel's private office. Wanda did not doubt that among the ten girls there were several who would have changed places with her if they could and dared.

The new position did not prove satisfactory to Wanda. Mr. Hummel expected a full day's work. If not difficult, it was an exacting position. She seldom took more than a half hour for lunch and it required speed and concentration to finish by five or five-thirty in the afternoon. In addition, Mr. Hummel expected a continuation of what Wanda termed "night work."

Mr. Ashmore had said nothing further about securing another position for her. She began looking for something else herself. She wanted an easy position. She was not interested in a business career. The rewards were too small. On the other hand she possessed a firm conviction that it was wiser to keep working. She finally learned of a position in a small real estate office. She called during her lunch hour. They engaged her and were willing to wait until she gave Mr. Hummel two weeks' notice. She told Mr. Hummel the same afternoon. He was ugly about it, especially when she frankly told him she was making a complete break with him. He stormed and threatened to make trouble for her.

She interrupted him by asking him to wait. She went into her little office and typed: "This is to certify that Miss Wanda Fulton has been employed by me as secretary. In this capacity she was efficient and satisfactory in every way. I am glad to recommend her as a capable secretary of good character."

"Sign this, please, Mr. Hummel."

"I'll do nothing of the kind."

She reached for the telephone.

"Hey, that's my house number. What are you doing?"

"Simply calling Mrs. Hummel for an appointment. I think that there are some things she really ought to know, don't you?"

"I'll sign it." He glared at her. "It won't be necessary for you to stay the two weeks. You can go now."

"So it is you. Fancy meeting you again."

Wanda looked up. "Hello, Adeline, where did you drop from?"

"Going in here to eat. I imagine you were, too."

"We'll eat together. Come on."

"Strange but I was thinking of you, Wanda, just a few minutes ago. A friend of mine wants a friend for a friend of his tonight."

"Business hey? Seeing it's Wednesday, my only night of uncrushed freedom, I am favorably disposed to consider your kind offer."

"Well, it really isn't business, Wanda. That is why I didn't want to ask any of Mrs. Jones' girls. They would be highly amused if I told them about George. He is a poor social worker—and I love him."

"I see, Adeline. What about this friend of his?"

"Poor, too, I imagine. They knew each other back home. He arrived in New York yesterday and George wants to show him a good time, simply good fellows getting together. Of course there is no money in it."

"That doesn't matter. I'd be glad to go."

At six o'clock Wanda taxied up to the apartment address Adeline had given her. As she pressed the button and waited for the door to be opened she realized that it was the first time in her life that she was visiting a man solely because she wanted to and without financial motives.

"How do you do. Wanda, isn't it? My name is George. This is Denis, practical broker and impractical artist. He's only a farmer's son, so go easy with him."

"Shake, I'm only a farmer's daughter. Golly, what smells so good?"

"I must apologize," George answered, as he took her coat and pulled off her hat. "I like to cook and we eat here. Adeline is late. If you know Adeline that remark is superfluous."

"I don't know her so very well. Not as well as I want to."

"Denis hasn't met Adeline. He can't believe that anybody

as wonderful as I have been describing could possibly exist."

"Oh but she can," Wanda answered. "You see, Denis, Adeline is a stately creature of gold, pink and white who makes you hope your table manners are proper and your English correct. She is very much *haute monde*. At the same time she graciously bends to you and, although you are a little surprised at your temerity, you are delighted to find yourself completely at home and comfortable. In other words she's a damn nice girl."

"Good. When she shows up there will be two such."

"A drink, Wanda?" George approached with a high ball.

"Thanks. Tell me, George, if I got it straight about your country cousin here. You say that he is a practical broker and—."

"Sure, he came to New York to work in a brokerage house. On Sundays, Saturday afternoons, Christmas and the Fourth of July he intends to paint. He wants to get a studio and paint you in the nude."

"I do not!"

"Why, I'm insulted, Denis. I'm very pretty."

"That's like saying two and two make four. I happen to be a landscape artist, or would-be artist."

There was a knock. "Adeline," George said, hurrying to the door. "Come in, dear. Here is Denis. Weren't Wanda and I right, old man?"

"All that you said is true. If God could only make a tree, who could make that?"

"Really, my dear Denis, you embarrass me."

"Let George do it," Wanda said soberly.

Adeline kissed George. "Who has a better right?" She winked at Wanda. "What's in the pot tonight, dear?"

"We start with lobster cocktail, a la sea, non can. We have cream of asparagus soup, non can, fillet mignon, potatoes au gratin, frozen fruit salad with whipped cream, cheese dressing and fig pudding saturated in rum sauce."

"By my sacred scales, this will be a wicked night." Adeline sat at the table and banged her knife and fork handles on the cloth. "Bring it on."

"A queen donning the jester's cap and bells," Denis said, looking at Adeline as he drew out Wanda's chair.

"Yet she still reigns, if you get what I mean," Wanda replied.

"You never saw Adeline with an apron on washing dishes, did you, Wanda?" George asked. "She did once, although she insisted upon using toilet soap and lukewarm water."

"No. I never have but I imagine it would be like having God do it."

"Oh, you all be quiet. It's simply a pose with me. I find it impresses people and as I'm tall it is my only protection. No tall girl is ever lanky if she remembers to keep her eyebrows lifted. You can't let your nose drag either."

"One would think you were snooty the way you talk," George said. "You aren't. You're the kind that demands a ring-side table without saying a word."

"This table suits me," Adeline answered. "So does the company and the soup."

"Denis," Wanda gazed at him meditatively, "could you paint a bowl of soup?"

"Perhaps."

"I wish you would. This is so good that I would like to preserve it some way. I could hang it on the wall and sigh, 'Doesn't it look natural?' As executed by that immortal soup painter, Denis—Denis?"

"Denis Wasson."

"By none other. See his name in the right corner? And the small soup ladle. That's his trade mark. Yes sir, that's just the way it looked before I ate it."

"I might go into this soup painting in a big way." Denis shoved his plate toward the center of the table and gazed at it with great seriousness.

"Don't do it. Better paint the stomachs that hold it. Now take Wanda for instance, wouldn't you rather paint—. Gosh," George laughed, "he's actually blushing."

"I congratulate you, Denis," Wanda reached for his hand and shook it. "Honest, I haven't seen a man blush since I left home."

"Oh, I know lots of other tricks. Now if I just had a pack of cards."

"Card tricks, my eye." Wanda looked scornful. "I'm a fire-eater and a sword-swallower myself."

"Give the little girl a hand." George clapped enthusiastically.

"Some people get so noisy when they have had a few drinks." Adeline wrinkled her nose.

"Changing the subject rather abruptly, George. What ever made you decide to be a social worker?" Wanda asked.

"Seriously, because I'm a damn fool. I'm an idealist. I don't know why I can get all hot and bothered about milk for babies, fresh air for tenement children and that truck."

"I wish he would get out of it," Adeline interrupted, "and get into something where he could make real money. That's all that keeps me from marrying the damn fool."

"She doesn't tell you, Wanda, that if I insisted that she would marry me on my sixty a week."

"Would you marry a man on sixty a week simply because you loved him?" Adeline addressed Wanda.

"If I loved a man and he loved me and he made sixty a week, I might marry him but I would keep on working. I would be a little afraid to tempt love by poverty."

"It seems to me," Denis said thoughtfully, "that real love ought to make happiness possible even on sixty a week."

"Well," Wanda answered, "we are getting serious but why be selfish about love? Why must George demand that Adeline give up a beautiful apartment, expensive clothes, a personal maid, dining in New York's best restaurants, seeing New York's best shows and the sound of gold jingling in her purse?"

"But they don't live together," Denis protested. "Besides, oh well."

"Go on and say it," Adeline urged. "I have other men."

"Well, I suppose I am terribly old fashioned but it is customary not to, isn't it?"

"It's customary not to admit it. There's damn little purity among the men I know and they aren't small fry in New York by any means. What they tell me about their home lives is no glorification of the female end of monogamy either."

"I don't want you to get me wrong, Adeline, or you either, Wanda. I don't think any the less of you girls. I suppose Adeline and George could marry."

"I'll admit," Adeline answered, "that it's so damn unconventional an idea that even I couldn't do it. One of my friends, a man, has a marriage of freedom. He and his wife have an agreement. They both step out."

"I think Denis is a little shocked," George said.

Denis shook his head. "No, I'm not. I've always sort of believed along the lines of what has been said tonight. I

guess, though, that I never expected to find anybody else that did. I thought I had unique thoughts."

"Wanda is thinking some deep thought," George injected. "She's sitting there sober as an owl."

"I was just wondering what it would be like to be in love. I'm so independent and free now."

"Let's you and me be friends, Wanda, and not fall in love." Denis spoke seriously.

"Did you get the catch in his voice when he said that?" George teased. "Sounded as solemn as a proposal."

"It is a proposal." Denis spread his napkin on the floor in front of Wanda and took her hand. "Will you be my friend and let me share your fireside on stormy days? Will you give me a free evening now and then for a show?"

"I would be tickled silly to have a man friend whose ambitions did not run entirely to kisses."

"It can't be done," Adeline interrupted. "There's no such thing as platonic love."

"Every man wants to kiss and coo." George spoke emphatically. "If he didn't, a woman wouldn't be able to resist the temptation of trying to make him desire to. Confess, Wanda, that if Denis always acted platonic you would begin to wonder what was the matter with you."

"The trouble is," Wanda answered, "that I know better than Denis himself does that the reason why he wants to be my friend."

"Give me a chance. Ditch me the moment I mention love."

"You're defeated before you start, Denis," Adeline sighed.

"I don't believe I could fall for a man." Wanda gazed quietly at Denis. "I have a peculiar slant on men. They all seem to me to be either childish or vicious. I know they can't all be that way. I suppose I've met the wrong kind."

"Maybe you have. Why not give me a trial?"

"Better get yourself some pretty young thing and marry her. It would be much more satisfactory for you."

"You said you would like a man friend who wouldn't ask for more than friendship. That's all I'm asking."

"You win, Denis, but don't say I didn't warn you."

Adeline got up from the table and moved over to the davenport. George followed her. "What do you say, George? I'll wager Denis will be wishing for Wanda's lips every step of the way home if he isn't already."

"Kiss him, Wanda, so I can observe his reactions."

"I'll do nothing of the kind, smarty. I am going to let Denis take me home and on the way we'll discuss literature and painting. Just a couple of intellectual pals interested in art, we two, hey Denis?"

Denis grinned sheepishly. "Yes, landscapes and not bellies, George."

"Don't forget an army travels on its stomach. You'll get to the bellies sooner or later."

Wanda felt sorry for Denis when she and he left George's apartment. She realized that already he was confessing to himself how much more he wanted from her than simply friendship. She did not dare ask him to come into her apartment. She was sure her maid, Lucy, was bribed by Ashmore to spy on her. Lucy apparently had not divulged her Wednesday night absences. A splitup would have meant the loss of her position. Still, she might tell if Wanda brought a man to the apartment.

She promised Denis a date for the following week when he left her at her door. She undressed slowly, thinking. She was unbearably tired of Ashmore. His querulousness and his desire to dominate formed a petty but persistent annoyance. Wanda paused in the act of reaching for her pajamas. She came to a decision and slipped on the pajamas and a dressing gown quickly. She glanced at her wrist watch. It was only a quarter after eleven. She went to the maid's room and knocked.

"Yes, mam, you want me, madam?"

"May I speak to you for a moment, Lucy?"

"Yes, mam."

Wanda entered and switched on the light. She sank in a chair beside Lucy's bed. "Don't bother to get up. Sorry to have disturbed your sleep."

"That's all right, madam. I'm not sleepy."

Wanda could sense Lucy's curiosity in her voice. "How much extra does Mr. Ashmore pay you for reporting on my movements, Lucy?"

"Nothing, he don't give me anything."

"I know he does, Lucy, although I'm sure you've never told him anything, which I appreciate."

"He gives me ten dollars extra a week. I tell him you stay home here nights waiting for him. He asked about Wednes-

days, when he never comes here. I told him you went to a movie on Wednesday but were always home around ten-thirty."

"I see. There is no reason why you shouldn't continue to earn the ten. However, in the future I'm going to risk staying out other nights besides Wednesdays. He seldom comes two nights in succession. I may even bring a man here once in a while."

"Yes, mam. I won't tell him. I knows you has your friends. Maybe if you get a lot of money you could help me out with a little extra." Lucy's voice was half defiant, half apologetic.

"Of course you know if Mr. Ashmore and I break he'll close the apartment and you'll be hunting a job?"

"Yes, mam, 'cept he told me he would give me two hundred dollars if I caught you with another man."

"When did he tell you that?"

"When he first hired me."

"I see. Then he wasn't trying to get you to frame me. He just wanted to be sure I didn't play ball elsewhere."

"Yes, mam." Lucy laughed. "Gentlemen are mostly queer that way. He will sure be mad though if he comes in some night and you ain't here."

"Sure, it will mean the gate for me. There are plenty of other men, Lucy, and as long as you prove trustworthy I won't forget you."

"You needn't worry, Miss Fulton. You have always been good to me and ain't cranky like Mr. Ashmore is. I'll do my best for you sure enough."

"Thanks, Lucy. Good night. Don't get up. I'll switch the light off."

Wanda slipped into bed smiling.

Her brow knitted in thought as she contemplated the evening with Denis and the others. She rather wished for his sake that she had not met him. If she could get him interested in May. She would give him anything he wanted. May wasn't beautiful but she was pretty. She had improved a lot, was more cheerful and agreeable.

Wanda decided to get May and Denis together. If he fell for her it would be fine. If he didn't—Wanda was half asleep—maybe she would be nice to him herself.

CHAPTER 7

"I don't know a thing about him, Wanda. I have never met him but he was recommended as being O.K. and he talks like a gentleman over the phone."

"I'll go. Thanks, Mrs. Jones, you'll hear from me later." Wanda read over the directions that she had jotted down on her telephone pad. "Taxi to Rye and stop just beyond service station one mile north of town. Car will be waiting."

She put a folding toothbrush and what she called her "safety first" in her pocketbook. She walked to the corner and hailed a taxicab. "You know the way to Rye, fellow?"

"Sure," the man's face brightened. "How about the fare back?"

"You'll have to settle that with my boy friend when we get there."

"Suppose he ain't there?"

"Then you'll be in luck for I'm sure coming back if he isn't and I'll pay you. He had better be, though."

"Jump in, lady. It's a beautiful night for a drive."

The driver stopped on the outskirts of Rye. "What's the address?"

"I don't know. You are to drive to a service station one mile north of the town and a car will be waiting for us."

"Say, suppose the guy got tired of waiting and ain't there? Not that you ain't worth waiting for, sister."

"He will get tired of waiting if you continue to park here."

They drove for a few minutes more.

"Gone a mile yet?" Wanda asked.

"Just about. There weren't no cars parked by that station we passed. It was less than a mile anyway."

"I'll bet that's the place. Look. Yep, there's a car a little bit ahead. Draw up behind it and stop."

A man got out of the car and approached the taxicab. "He's got money," Wanda made mental comment. "About fifty-five and vigorous; not bad."

The man leaned over the driver's seat and took the little printed slip the chauffeur handed him. "Here, you have to get back, I suppose."

"Thank you, sir."

The man nodded and opened the taxi door. He assisted Wanda to alight. Silently, he put her in the front of his car and took the wheel. He glanced in the rear-vision mirror. "Still parked. Probably trying to get my license number. Nosey, those taxi drivers. I have a little place four miles from here. No one but us two. Wanda, call me—Bill."

Wanda noticed the slight hesitation before the use of the name "Bill." She was disappointed in realizing that she had taken an instant dislike to her companion. She shrugged inwardly. What did it matter? He evidently had paid the taxicab man well. She made no protest when the man laid his hand on her knee. She hid her disgust when the hand moved under her skirt. She only thought that he displayed bad taste in such premature advances.

The car turned off the road and came to a stop before a small but attractive cottage in an isolated spot. Bill lifted her out of the car and carried her onto the porch. He set her down as he sought for the key.

"You're strong," she said.

"As an ox. I could crush your bones into a jelly if I wanted."

"Such a pleasant thought," Wanda replied, her eyes narrowing.

"A drink first," he said when they were in the living room. He took two highball glasses. "Look." He poured a glass full. "That's my drink. Game to take as much yourself?"

"It will make me drunk. That's enough. You are just wasting it. It's whiskey, isn't it?"

"Of course it is. I want you to be drunk. I want to be drunk myself."

"You can get drunk yourself, Bill, if you want. I'd rather not, if it's just the same to you."

"Listen, Wanda, I'm a respectable business man. I keep this shack here for fun. There's five hundred dollars for you in the morning. Now let's have a drink."

"You've still got a half a tumbler full left in your glass."

"Oh, that." He drank it down, his eyes staring at her. He shook his head angrily as he finished the drink and poured his glass half full again.

"You're a hound for punishment." Wanda pretended admiration.

"Better take another sampler like your last."

"All right, I will." Wanda finished her glass. "There, that's about twice what I generally drink, almost half a glass."

"Not enough to make a flea stumble. Watch." He drank the half glass of whiskey evenly.

"I don't see how you do it."

"I'm no weakling. Feel my arm."

"Please, you're crushing my fingers in your biceps. Do you hear, I ask you to stop!" Wanda kicked with all her strength at his shin.

The man laughed. "You hurt me. You're a she devil. By jove, that hurt."

Wanda flexed the knuckles of her hand. "You seem very pleased about it. I almost broke my toes."

A frown of annoyance crossed Wanda's brow. She opened her eyes and glanced about the room. Through habit the frown disappeared. The corners of her mouth parted. "Good morning, Bill," her voice was cheerful. "How are you this morning?"

"Quite well, thank you. Can you dress in half an hour? We will eat breakfast in Rye."

"Sure, be ready in twenty minutes."

"Very well, I've had my bath. I'll dress in the other room so you can get up."

They rode in silence to Rye. Wanda made a few comments at the table that she thought might interest him regarding the real estate office in which she worked. "I think every artist and writer in the village, the real and aspiring hopefuls, come into the place to rent apartments."

The man nodded or made aloof polite answers. Back in the car again, she studied him with quick sidewise glances. "You don't object if I talk a little, Bill?"

"No, certainly not. What were you going to say?"

"Enigmas always interest me. Why do you do—this?"

Apparently ignoring her question his eyes gazed straight at the road ahead of the fast moving car. She concluded that no reply would be forthcoming and resigned herself to enjoying the fresh morning air rushing through the open windows.

He slowed the car and reached for a cigarette. She snapped

her lighter and held it for him.

"My wife perhaps. She ran off with another man. That was rather a mistake. She wrote me from Mexico. He had cleared out. She wrote she was hungry. The fool!"

"Well, did you send her money?"

"What for? I didn't want her back. She left me, you know. Walked right out on me with a note on my dresser when I got home. A nice woman. Well, she died down there, still hungry, I guess."

He let her out at the corner, near her office. She put him out of her mind. That evening she telephoned May. "Hello, May, dear, how are you?"

"Lonesome, mayn't I come over?"

"No, I'm half expecting Mr. Ashmore. I called to tell you that next Wednesday I am bringing a man over to see you. He is supposed to be my boy friend. I want you to annex him and make him your private property. Want to?"

"If you think I'll like him. What's his name?"

"Denis. Gradually win him over for yourself. Not necessarily the first time you meet him. Be clever. You'll like him. He paints—pictures. He needs someone like you. He will be good for what ails you, too."

A quarter after five, Wanda straightened up her desk. She had asked Denis to call for her at five-thirty. She found herself listening to a conversation between Miss Schmidt, one of the rental agents, and a tall, lean man with a high, intelligent brow from which was carefully brushed back very black hair.

"But why did she say you must go and break your lease?" Miss Schmidt was insisting.

"My girl threw a whiskey bottle out in the street."

"Oh!"

"But it didn't hit anybody."

"Just clean wholesome fun, hey?"

The man smiled. "Georgia is a nut. I'd like you to meet her, Miss Schmidt."

"Thanks."

The man looked over in Wanda's direction. His face brightened. "Hello," he saluted her with a quick jerk of his hand. "My name's Bert." He started to get up.

Wanda waved him back with a downward motion of her

hand. "Hello," she answered. "Here comes my Denis. I must go. Give my best to Georgia, won't you?"

"I'd be delighted to. Whom shall I say?"

"My name's Wanda, Bert. I hope the bottle was empty when it was thrown."

"Most assuredly it was. Georgia took care of that. Nice girl, Georgia."

"I'm sure of it."

"I'd like you to meet her."

"Any time you and Miss Schmidt say. Denis, this is Bert."

"How do you do." Denis held out his hand.

"How are you? Say, Denis, how about us all getting together sometime. Schmidty here and Wanda and Georgia—Have to get another man though for Schmidty. Say, Schmidty, this is Denis. You two haven't met yet."

Miss Schmidt nodded. "Here's the addresses. I've got an engagement and must run along."

"Thanks. How about our getting together some time?"

"Maybe. Got to go now. Glad to have met you, Denis. Wanda's a nice girl."

"Sure, they're all nice girls." Bert grabbed Wanda's arm and started toward the door. Denis followed a little uncertainly.

On the street Bert drew Denis toward him. They formed a little circle about which hurrying pedestrians shoved and surged. "I have it. Next Monday a friend is throwing a party up at his place. Wait, I'll scribble down the address for you. Come around about nine or so. Right?"

"But your friend won't be expecting us."

Bert's face looked blank. "What difference does that make? You're friends of mine. Monte will be damn glad to have you."

"We'll be there, then. Tell Monte to lay two more plates and several glasses."

"Swell, which way are you two going?"

Wanda looked at Denis.

"Do you know a good place to eat around here?" he asked.

"Food or drink?"

"Food, I guess."

"No better place to eat than that dump over there." He pointed. "See you Monday. Georgia is waiting for me." He waved and moved down the street.

"That's the opposite from the sort of life I lived at home," Denis said, as he pulled out Wanda's chair for her in the restaurant.

"You mean Bert and Georgia. Free and easy and rather nice for them, especially Bert."

"You think he gets more out of it than she?"

"Not necessarily now. I can picture Georgia. Pretty, probably, a lot of men anxious to make her, feels she's in love with Bert but taking her pick of the other men. The girls back in your home town have to content themselves with a flirtation, the knowledge of admiration and cautious kisses. Georgia just takes anything from men that she wants."

"Why do you say, especially nice for Bert, then?"

"Oh, women will still want Bert at forty. She isn't the sort that saves money. Money is woman's safest bet at forty, marriage the next best."

"I think you put it backwards, Wanda. I don't think money can mean as much to a woman as a home, a husband and children."

"Maybe I just was speaking for myself. Marriage is all right for others. Personally I would rather have my maid do my nails and hair for me than to wash diapers."

"Why not have a maid to wash the diapers?"

"You would like to marry me, wouldn't you, Denis?"

"Yes." He spoke the word as though surprised at hearing himself say it.

"You are young and pleasing. Have you money to hire a maid?"

"No, not now, but—"

"There you have your answer. You know, I feel a bit like studying you, though."

"How do you mean?"

"If I could fall in love I suppose it would be with somebody like you, good looking, kind, intelligent and with a certain strength. If I weren't afraid of hurting you, young fellow, I'd like to have you make love to me and discover my reactions."

"I'd like to pull you off your high horse and make you love me."

They had arrived at the restaurant. The dinner was not bad and they discussed everything including themselves. Afterward Wanda took Denis over to May's apartment.

She was not at all surprised to observe how quickly May showed a keen interest in Denis. She thought, too, that May handled herself rather well. She was appropriately casual. Denis was all unsuspecting of the bait and trap May endeavored to set for him.

Wanda was quiet when several hours later Denis escorted her to her own apartment. She knew that Denis was attracted to May but that she was a grave obstacle. Denis thought that he loved her.

"I don't suppose it would be possible for me to come up for a while?" he asked, wistfully.

"Why, yes, you may," she answered a bit dubiously.

He sat somewhat timidly in a winged chair.

After a few minutes, he looked at his watch and sighed, "I had better go."

"Wait, let's have a drink first." She went over to a cabinet and swung open the doors. She chose Scotch and went out into the kitchen for ice. When she returned she set the drinks on a coffee stand before the chesterfield. He sat beside her.

"Did you like May?" she asked.

"Very much," he answered.

"Poor girl, I feel so sorry for her."

"Why? She seemed a cheerful sort."

"She's in love with an artist or was. They broke up some time ago. She's all broken up. You see, she is a passionate girl. In a nice way, I mean."

"You're not hinting that I should take her artist friend's place, are you?"

"Oh, I suppose you could win May over if you tried hard enough. Not that it would be easy. Bad boy, I think you're having unfaithful thoughts." She patted his knee playfully.

He took her hand. She could feel him trembling a little. "I couldn't be unfaithful to you."

"No," she teased.

"I'd better go."

"Kiss me good night then and go." She stood up, smiling inwardly and yet surprised to find her heart beating faster. She knew that when he kissed her he wouldn't go.

His lips tingled her. She felt herself responding with a keen surge of joy that was new to her. She took delight in having him strain himself against her. His awkward fingers moving across her body made her quiver with expectation.

Without his knowing how they got there she led him toward the bedroom.

There charged through Denis a feeling of infinite power and deep tenderness so great that for one wild minute he thought the end of the world had come. During that one brief minute he could not have believed that life would go on in its usual commonplace matter-of-fact way. People could not continue to eat their dinners and brush their teeth and put their dimes in the subway slots and do all those customary things. Perhaps he thought of all the people sitting on hill-sides and gazing at lakes or the seas and writing poems and singing songs. A world of dreamers, who, having once tasted love, knew there was nothing else and spent their lives star gazing and musing.

He was brought back to the world as it unfortunately is by a sound outside the bedroom door. "What is that?" he asked.

"It's Lucy, my maid," she answered. "She's using the phone. It's—it's all right, don't worry." Wanda's brow knitted in thought. Surely, though, Lucy was not up to anything.

"Beautiful," he breathed. "I love you."

"Mustn't love me, dear."

"I feel as if all the stars in the sky had banged themselves together. I feel as if I could paint a landscape that would show God's face shining through it."

"And that's the way sinning makes you feel?"

"I don't believe it's a sin, Wanda. It couldn't be. Why would God make it so nice if—"

Wanda stared and raised herself to a sitting position. Unconsciously she flung her arm across Denis to protect him. She swallowed once and then spoke evenly. "If you'll have the decency, Mr. Ashmore, to get out of here, I'll dress and talk to you in the living room."

"You damn little cheating slut," he snarled.

"Don't you talk to her like that." Denis, starting to get up, stared at Mr. Ashmore.

Wanda shoved him back into his pillow. "Keep out of this. It's a private fight. Remember, he's an old man."

Mr. Ashmore quivered with rage.

"You, you—!"

"Get out, do you hear? Get out or I'll take a crack at you myself." He cringed slightly as Wanda advanced toward him,

and backed. She gave him a shove out into the hall and slammed the door in his face. She dressed quickly and warned Denis to remain in the bedroom.

"Mr. Ashmore," she seated herself calmly in the living room as he paced back and forth, "I am going to ask you to shut the apartment door quietly when you leave. You gave me my usual stipend for last week. You owe me for part of this week but in view of everything we'll pass that up. I'll vacate in the morning.

"And now, Mr. Ashmore, I hope all unpleasantness is over. What I did you may expect other girls to do. The only thing you have is money and you can't buy real loyalty with that. It's impossible for a girl as young as I to love you. I'm sorry if I hurt your pride. I hope your next girl fully restores it. Good night."

CHAPTER 8

"Hey, Bert, come and introduce us to this chap here." Wanda yelled into the open doorway.

"Gosh, Wanda and Denis. This is your host, Monte. I asked them to come."

"Welcome!" Monte exclaimed. "We have serious business on tonight."

"What's that?" Denis asked.

Monte bent and whispered in Denis' ear.

"So." Wanda tapped one foot on the floor.

Solemnly Denis bent and whispered hoarsely. "He says we are to get pie-eyed."

"Well, we can't get pie-eyed standing in the hall." Wanda shoved Monte aside and strode into the apartment.

There was a long living room with three front windows that faced on West Ninth Street. Sitting on a couch, chairs and cushions placed on the floor were six girls and five men, including Bert, Monte and Denis.

"I'm Charlie," one of the men said, and came up to Wanda. "The girls are sore because there aren't more men. Personally,

I like it this way. Just that much more chance that I'll get a break." He reached beneath a girl who was sitting on two cushions and yanked the lower one from under her. It overturned her and disarranged her skirt so that quite a stretch of white skin showed above one knee.

"We were discussing Monte when you two came in," Charlie said. "Gladys, who is so careless with her skirt, claims Monte has a mistress and has accused every girl here but herself of being it. They all deny it. What do you think?"

"Maybe Gladys is."

Gladys looked over her shoulder at Wanda and shook her head.

"She says she isn't guilty."

"No, I don't think she is for she and I are married and she's been home every night for the last two weeks—worse luck."

"What's she staying home for every night?" Wanda asked.

"I wouldn't want to brag," Charlie answered, "but—"

"For heaven's sake," Gladys interrupted. "Don't let him kid you, my dear. He got married because he wanted a home. Maybe he thought I could cook. All he does is talk."

Charlie grinned. "You don't believe that?"

"She ought to know."

"If no one will fill my glass I'll have to do it myself." A girl got up from the couch and stretched. She winked friendly at Wanda and swayed slightly as she went into the kitchen. A man followed her.

Monte stood in front of the piano. He looked at Wanda. "For you and your escort's benefit I might explain that the gang has been criticizing a play that I have been writing. Their suggestions have helped a lot and tonight is the final reading of the last act."

He read with animation and considerable dramatic ability. Wanda thought it was excellent. She caught Denis' eye where he was sitting on the floor across the room from her. A blonde girl was reclining against him. She quite evidently considered him her property for the evening.

When the reading was over Monte poured fresh drinks. Charlie went over to a girl at the piano and Gladys moved away from the man beside her.

"He keeps insisting that I date him," she told Wanda.

"And you don't want to?" she questioned.

"No, he's in our crowd and the others would be sure to find out. It would be humiliating to Charlie."

"What does Charlie do?"

"He writes advertising copy but he wants to write short stories. He has a few accepted. I only wish he could give all his time to it. What do you do?"

"I'm just a stenographer. Denis and I met Bert at a real estate office."

"And you never have written a play or dabbled paint or composed a swell song that you haven't sold yet—but—? How delightful."

"I'm afraid I'm pretty practical. My ambition, Gladys, seems to consist solely in the idea of making enough money in my youth to be able to do my dreaming when I reach my thirties."

"As a stenographer?" Gladys' eyes glanced over Wanda's evening gown.

Wanda gazed into Gladys' face and found its expression kind. "I have friends," she said. She was curious as to the reaction of Gladys—an intellectual—to a frank acknowledgment of her means of obtaining money.

"Denis, you mean?" Gladys glanced over in his direction. At that precise second Denis was being kissed by the blonde girl.

"No, he's poor. Blondie seems to like him."

"Oh, Mary Lee is scalp hunting. But if she finds that you are having an affair she won't make further advances. Mary Lee is a very decent person."

"And you?"

"Once in a while I think it would be nice to cheat on Charlie. I'm afraid I'm pretty faithful. Of course, Charlie and I tell each other that we are free to enjoy a love holiday."

"How would you feel, though, if Charlie spent a night—well, with me for instance?"

"Intellectually I would sanction it. Emotionally I would hate it."

"You love him, don't you?"

"Very much, Wanda. So much so—" Gladys paused. "Come into the bedroom. I want to ask you something quite confidential."

Wanda rose with considerable curiosity. Gladys shut the bedroom door after them and turned the key.

"I wanted to talk to you about your—your way of getting rich. Let me explain. Charlie works in an advertising office. It's poor pay and he despises his work. He wants to write. I am a sculptor and perhaps you know what that means financially. Sometimes I'm afraid that our poverty is going to kill everything that's best in both of us. Is it—" she sat down on the bed and stared at Wanda with troubled, frightened eyes. "Is it very terrible to get money that way?"

Wanda did not immediately answer. She appraised Gladys' flushed impetuous face.

"Are you really serious?" Wanda asked.

"The idea occurred to me when we were talking. It might be a way out. Charlie and I can't go on the way we are."

"I think you can. Most young married people have financial troubles. They are agonizing but people live through them. You have a nice body, I think. Take your clothes off."

Gladys looked over at the closed and locked door and then slipped off her dress.

"Take the rest off," Wanda demanded as Gladys stood uncertainly after removing her dress. She blushed as she undressed. "Turn around," Wanda ordered, softening the command with a grin.

"Well?" Gladys asked a bit defiantly.

"Dress and get comfortable beside me again. You know, Gladys, I don't think you are taking into account the practical difficulties. How would you get away from Charlie at night?"

"That would be a problem. How about afternoons? I am free all day."

Wanda shook her head. "It would be difficult. Besides—you don't mind my being frank, do you?"

"No. I wish you would."

"If you once started on a tear there might be no holding you. It would break up your home, sure. Better stick to Charlie. You love him."

"You think I'm not pretty enough?"

"You're crazy, Gladys. If my friend, Mrs. Jones, saw you she would grab your phone number quicker than a hawk's swoop. Well—maybe we'd better go back."

"But we haven't settled anything. I need money badly. Besides," she reached for Wanda's hand, "don't think badly of me, but Charlie doesn't satisfy me."

"You mean you don't care for him that way?"

"No, it's divine when he does but, oh, damn it, he doesn't enough."

"I don't know what to tell you, Gladys. It's so dangerous. It would be a shame to do anything that would kill Charlie's love."

"There doesn't seem to be any solution at that."

"You look so dejected, honey. I'll tell you. Go over the whole matter in your mind during the next few days. If you feel that you just must do something give me a ring. I may be able to help you."

"Thanks, Wanda, thanks a lot. I'm afraid I may take you up on that."

When the girls came back into the living room they found that the party had progressed considerably. Someone had started the phonograph. Several were dancing with the frank bodily enjoyment that liquor inspired.

The dance number on the phonograph came to an end. "For God's sake, don't put that record on again," Monte expostulated, "I hate the damn thing."

"Give it to me," Mary Lee said, getting up from the couch.

Monte handed it to her. She went to the window. "Come here, crowd," she yelled. "Look. See that geezer down there?" She pointed to a lone pedestrian. She aimed directly behind him and threw the record. It crashed at the back of his feet. The crowd about the window ducked back but not quickly enough.

The man looked up. He drew his coat lapel about his neck and stopped. "Any more?" he yelled, his voice coming faintly up the four stories.

"Ask him up." Mary Lee turned to Monte.

Monte leaned out the window. "Hey, you, come up."

The man nodded his head and made for the doorway.

Mary Lee went over to the door and opened it. "How's your wind?" she greeted him as he came around the hall below and started on his fourth flight. "I'm Mary Lee," she held out her hand.

He was a tall, dark-haired man in his late twenties or early thirties. He was conventionally and well dressed save for his feet, which were garbed in old-fashioned carpet slippers.

"Just like dad used to wear at home." Mary Lee pointed to the slippers.

"Went out for a bit of air. I live down the street. I'm Stewart Winters."

"We can't help that," Mary Lee injected. "Come in, even if you are." She led him around showing off his slippers. "You get to throw the next record."

Monte solemnly handed the man one. He took it gravely and walked to the window. "Just so I play according to rules. Am I supposed to hit the party or just scare him to death?"

"You do it like this." Monte took up another record and tip-toed to the window. "You lurk in the shadow and await your prey. Shush, here comes one now, a woman. Glorious! You take careful aim and—" whizz—the record shot down and shattered just behind the girl's feet. Everyone ducked.

"Listen, Monte," one of the men protested. "We'll get in a hell of a mess over this."

"Think of the poor street cleaners," Stewart Winters exclaimed. He held his record sideways and whirled it. It sailed gracefully across the street and scooped into an open window just grazing the window frame.

The room was immediately illuminated. A pajama-clad body leaned out of the window. "Damn you," the man's voice reached them. He looked down on the street and then up straight into Monte's lighted apartment. "I'm going to call the police."

"The man's angry," Mary Lee giggled.

"Let's get out of here." One of the girls started looking for her wraps.

"And leave Monte to face the music alone?" Wanda asked.

The girl shrugged and threw herself down in a chair.

When a few minutes later the door bell buzzed Monte pressed the downstairs catch release and reached for the manuscript of his play. He started reading while everyone listened with an almost ludicrous attentiveness.

When Wanda opened the door two officers stood taking in the scene. Monte continued reading. Seated decorously about the apartment, his guests, rapt in studious contemplation, listened soberly.

"There's been a complaint made. Someone threw a record in the window across the street."

"A record?" Monte stopped reading. "What kind of a record?"

"What is this anyway?" the other officer stepped forward.

"I have been reading a play that is to be produced at Shubert's. My guests here are all theatrical people. You say there has been a complaint made. I haven't been reading very loud."

"It ain't your reading. You can read your damn head off. It's throwing records. Like these," he marched over toward the phonograph.

"You mean," Wanda asked, "that someone here was supposed to throw a record out of one of our windows and right into a room across the street. Why, it's impossible. I'll bet you couldn't do it yourself, officer."

The police stepped over to the window and looked out. "I don't see how they could have done it for a fact," one said to the other. They turned. "Well, maybe you didn't," one of them muttered somewhat reluctantly, "but don't do it again."

When the police left, Monte's guests started gathering their coats. They congratulated Wanda and Monte.

"Heavens," one girl said. "I didn't dare move or open my mouth. I knew I had too much liquor aboard."

"It was a swell party, Monte." Wanda stood at the doorway with Denis.

"You'll come back again next Monday? I'm inviting the fire department next week."

"Good," Denis laughed. "We'll be here."

As Wanda and Denis walked toward Sixth Avenue to take the train to the small hotel where Wanda had decided to stay until she could find an apartment she could afford, they saw a pair of satin pumps and a pair of carpet slippers turn into a doorway halfway down the street. "Blondie got a fellow, after all," Wanda remarked. "Sorry it isn't you?"

"That depends," Denis answered knowingly.

CHAPTER 9

The taxicab drew up at the curb. "This all right, lady?"

"Yes, thank you." Wanda gave him a quarter tip and walked to Mrs. Jones' respectable-appearing brownstone

front. She pressed the door button, "short, long and short." The door opened immediately. She walked into the reception parlor.

Mrs. Jones appeared and stretched out her hand in greeting. As often as Wanda had taken part in the usual formula of Mrs. Jones' entrance into this room she never could get over the feeling that she had been invited by a cultured society woman to drop in for tea. Whatever went on behind the locked doors of the upstairs rooms, respectability and quiet, good manners prevailed downstairs.

"You have been well, dear? Everything going nicely?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jones. I like your gown. New, isn't it?"

"Thank you, yes. Your suit is charming on you. Wanda, I want you to meet a young man. He's quite young, a college freshman. Lots of money. And quite spoiled, of course."

"He sounds interesting, Mrs. Jones."

"There, that's the bell. Go into the library. It may be somebody else. Wait, I recognize his voice." She went into the hall and brought back a slim, good-looking boy with wavy blonde hair. "This is Mr. Van Dyke, Wanda. Now, I'll leave you two to become acquainted with one another."

The boy ignored Mrs. Jones' exit. "You'll do," he said condescendingly, his eyes moving over Wanda, who wore a dark blue suit trimmed in black fox. It fit her snugly and made her a warm, cuddly thing that looked expensive and difficult to obtain but, oh, so desirable.

"I'm glad I suit you," she spoke in her usual husky voice but she put a bit of quiet dignity into it. "I understand you go to college, Mr. Van Dyke."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"With what?" Wanda's voice was sweet with an edge to it.

"With our getting together."

"Just why, young man, do you consider yourself superior to me?"

"What? Why, you are a—." His voice faltered under her steady gaze.

"I don't like snobbery, Mr. Van Dyke. We've met in a rather unconventional way. But, aside from that, I see no great difference between us, except, perhaps, that my manners are a little more considerate than yours."

"I apologize." He bowed gravely.

Wanda linked her arm in his. "Come on. Let's go out to

dinner and if you behave well enough you may come up to my place later."

Wanda enjoyed her dinner. Van Dyke was attentive and amusing. They both were gay and carefree when he took her home. She asked him in for a drink, and as he was helping her remove her coat, she turned to him and took hold of his two hands. "I think you are very sweet. Now I would like you to kiss me."

He kissed her lightly without removing his hands from hers.

"That was nice." She slipped her hands out of his. She did not move away. "Suppose we try again." She moved slightly closer so that her body lightly fitted against his. When his lips came in contact with hers she blew her warm, scented breath against his mouth, and held herself still. Suddenly, his arms tightened about her.

"Not too fast, dear. Hold me close. Now kiss me—again—again."

"Yes," he breathed, his voice jumpy with happiness.

They lay side by side talking. "I never knew anybody so wonderful as you," he was telling her.

"And how many have you known?" she questioned.

"Well, in Newport we boys used to go down into town nights and date up the servant girls."

"How about girls in your own set?"

"Not so easy. Can't get them alone for one thing. I did with Nancy. Oh, I forgot. But then you don't know Nancy, so it's all right my mentioning her name. Listen, Wanda, how about you being my steady girl?"

"I think that is a very nice idea."

"Great, I'll get you an apartment and you can furnish it and whenever I can, I'll come and see you."

"Where are you going to get all this money, Boy?"

"Why do you call me 'Boy'? It sounds as if you were making fun of me."

"Nonsense. I'm as young as you are. I like to call you 'boy.' It suits you, darling. Mayn't I?"

"If you let me call you 'Girl.'"

"Good, you're my boy and I'm your girl."

"For keeps—"

"Forever."

"And ever—"

"Or until you get tired of me, Boy."

"I don't see how I ever could."

"No, we don't at the time. Still maybe we will be boy and girl to each other for a long time."

"We will. And to think how you bawled me out at first."

"That was because I knew you were fine underneath and I wanted us to get started right."

"Wanda."

"My name is Girl."

He kissed her. "Girl, you know, I can't believe that you have known other men."

"You've known other girls, Boy."

"Yes, but now that we are going to go together and I am getting you an apartment and all, there won't be any others, will there?"

"No, Boy. Just as you are planning now to be faithful to me, I'm planning to be faithful to you."

"Can you go with me to find an apartment in the morning?"

In the morning, when the boy awoke, he blinked his eyes in the golden light pouring through the windows. He felt strange; as though he had dreamed something half evil, half pleasant. A momentary repulsion seized him. He sat up in bed, cautious not to awaken Wanda. His eyes followed the contour of the sheet. She was there under that sheet; her creamy white body, lay there. He pulled the sheet down gently. A different feeling came over him, a sort of sweet tenderness mixed with a throbbing of his blood. He could feel the blood beat in his temples. He pulled her toward him and caressed her. She sighed in her sleep and then, half awake, her eyes opened slowly and gazed for a moment into his.

She smiled as her arms closed about him.

They discussed the apartment during breakfast. Wanda telephoned Miss Schmidt and secured some addresses. She took Van Dyke to a new apartment building in the Village. He wanted one of the larger apartments but the attendant showed a cheaper apartment on the eighteenth floor that Wanda was determined to have.

"I don't want a maid's room or a maid, Boy. The apartment management rents them by the hour. After all, you have

plenty of ways of spending your allowance. Why squander a lot in renting a barn when what we want is a nest?"

She wanted to keep the rent down to a figure that she could afford personally in case of a break-up between Van Dyke and herself. She had misgivings about the permanency of his affection. The apartment consisted of a fair sized living room with a studio window that occupied almost the entire front and from which could be viewed the two rivers. The ceiling was of glass and there were no visible lighting fixtures. The bedroom, done in pearl gray, was almost as large as the living room. The bathroom had a glass enclosed shower. The far end of the kitchen was panelled in maple and was fitted with table and benches. It had a casement window and its ledge formed a window seat.

"It's a wonderful place, Boy. Get it for me."

"You're sure you want it? Why not get that larger apartment we looked at downstairs?"

"We'll be closer together in this," she whispered.

"But, darling, I want you to have the best there is."

"If you take that other apartment, when I get mad at you I'll go into the maid's room and lock you out."

"Maybe we had better take this then."

"Let's."

He signed a year's lease and paid the first month's rent. He wanted to accompany her and help choose the furniture but she dissuaded him. She wanted to get the right kind of furniture. She bought a magazine on interior-decorating, and determined to get a book or two in the library on furniture.

Van Dyke talked enthusiastically of getting settled in the apartment soon. When he left he cleaned out his pocketbook except for a five dollar bill. He gave her five hundred and three dollars. She realized that he had absolutely no conception of what the furniture would cost. She thanked him and said nothing.

Wanda was alone in the office. She lit a cigarette and thought over things. When Van Dyke had told her he wanted her to be true to him she intended to, with a couple of reservations. There was Denis, whom she wanted to humor until she could turn him over to May for keeps. She felt a tenderness toward May, a friendship that bound her to the girl.

Denis told May that he was in love with Wanda and wanted

to marry her. But both Wanda and May were determined otherwise. Wanda cheered May by saying, "There's two against one, so what chance has he got? He'll marry you."

Wanda's mind went back to the problem of Van Dyke. She wondered what the allowance was that his father gave him. She had seen his father's picture in the paper on several occasions. He was a power in Wall Street. Unquestionably he could write out his son a check for a thousand dollars every day and not feel it. Just as unquestionably that was something he wouldn't do, not even once a week. Certainly not without asking questions. To furnish the apartment the way she wanted to furnish it easily would cost at least a couple of thousand. Quite apparently young Van Dyke could not be depended upon to furnish the apartment, much less make it possible for Wanda to keep on increasing her own bank balance.

There was no help for it, she decided. She would have to continue going to Mrs. Jones'. If Van Dyke found out she would have to face that problem when it came.

"Too bad," Wanda murmured to herself. "He's a nice infant. But hell's bells, what am I going to do for feathers? That nest has to be lined somehow."

Van Dyke met her at five-thirty that evening. She explained about the furniture. He looked blank when she told him that they might have to furnish the rest of the apartment gradually.

"Furniture is expensive, Boy. It will be more fun to not buy everything at once."

"I'll get some money out of the governor. Hell, I'm sorry, Girl. I didn't think."

"I don't want you asking your father for a lot of money. Suppose he asks you what you want it for?"

"I ought to give you spending money." Van Dyke's eyes clouded.

She kissed away his frown. "Don't you dare look worried when you are with me. Don't forget that we two are in love with each other."

CHAPTER 10

There was a small switchboard on Wanda's desk. One of the little disks fell and buzzed. "I want to speak to Wanda, please," a voice called.

"This is Wanda. Who is calling?"

"Teddy Bear."

"Oh, you were at the party at Monte's."

"Yes, Wanda, how about a date tomorrow night?"

"I'm sorry, Teddy, but I can't."

"I was afraid of that. You could let me buy you a lunch today?"

"Yes, twelve thirty."

"Righto, I'll be waiting at the door."

"Sold, good-bye."

"You're a half minute late," he made his voice tragic as he took her arm.

"I thought you would appreciate me more if I kept you waiting."

"It seemed as though it were—"

"Yes, I know, years. How original you are!"

He took her to Longchamps and ignored the regular luncheon.

"Are you trying to impress me?" she inquired as he ordered lavishly and skillfully.

"I always feed a customer well when I want to sell something."

"You're wasting your money, I'm not in a buying mood. Can't I rent you an apartment?"

"A splendid idea but of course you will have to see the one I have in order to judge what I need."

"Is that what you were trying to sell?"

"Eventually, I hope. For the present, no. I want to take you to a party tomorrow night."

"Do they call you Teddy Bear because you're so cute?"

she asked, ignoring his invitation.

"No, they nicknamed me that because they said I had a hugging complex."

"You're one of those 'millions for conquest but not one cent for marriage' boys."

"Heavens, you don't want to get married, do you? I would marry you in a minute, Wanda, only I haven't got a ring."

"Well, in that case, tell me about the party."

He did not immediately answer. "It's a secret as far as Monte and his crowd are concerned," he spoke seriously.

"You aren't squeamish, I hope."

"No." Wanda was becoming curious.

"You seemed like a good sport," he continued, "and you're undoubtedly a heady sort of a girl. I would like your promise before I go further that you won't repeat our conversation. If you are engaged to that chap who brought you that night and are in the habit of telling him things, I'd rather we just finish what I hope you think is a nice luncheon and forget my indiscreet murmurings."

"Would there be any money in it for me?"

His face brightened. "There could be." He gave her a frank, inquiring glance.

"Are you kept?"

"I am. You will find that I can be trusted with secrets."

"Good. I'm an artist photographer. As far as most people are concerned it is a perfectly legitimate business. I photograph difficult interiors, artistic exteriors such as a house in a snow storm, long time exposures that have an arty flare. There's good money in it providing you can get the orders. What I'm about to tell you started when a customer of mine hemmed and hawed and asked me to take some naughty pictures."

"You mean that you want me to pose for you that way? Nothing doing, Teddy, so let's finish our luncheon."

"No, you haven't got the idea. It's that this wealthy man has some friends, both men and women. They are throwing a party tomorrow night. It's one of those parties where everything or anything goes. They have been having these parties for over a year. Started one night when someone, drunker than the rest, suggested strip poker. They—well, frankly, they are a little tired of each other's charms." He stopped and played with his coffee spoon.

Wanda waited. He took a deep breath and went on. "They want another couple. I've got the chap picked out and he agrees but he is afraid to bring any girl he knows."

"Am I supposed to be his partner for the evening?"

"You could call it that. It would mean more. Things are very free. I suppose they are the naughtiest group of cultivated, well-to-do people in New York. Maybe in the world, for all I know."

"What do you get out of it?"

"I'm their manager. All these affairs are held out at a club house on Long Island."

"Just what would I be in for, if I went?"

"No one would in any way injure you. In fact, no one would do anything to you that you didn't permit. The only thing is that it would be better for you not to go if you would have any reservations. Perhaps I'm shocking you."

"Somehow you don't look like the sort that would propose a scheme of this kind, Teddy. No. Count me out."

"Heck, I'm sorry, Wanda. I don't mind telling you that I lose five hundred if I don't bring you."

"Can't you get somebody else?"

"Do you know of anyone?"

"I could get you a girl easy if there were money in it."

"Would money interest you?"

"It might."

"Are you free tomorrow night?"

"Yes."

"You wouldn't have to go again. Of course the chap that offered me the five hundred thinks you will but that has nothing to do with my getting it. Aspinwall will come across. I'll split fifty-fifty. There's two hundred and fifty cash in it for you. Hell, Wanda, what have you got to lose? At least you won't be bored. Maybe you'll get a laugh out of it if nothing else—and two hundred and fifty besides."

"All right, Ted. I'll go for two hundred and fifty. I hope I won't regret it."

"Shoot, you won't. I have your word that you won't spout to anybody?"

"Of course. I'll be late getting back to work."

"I'll meet you in front of your office at five-thirty tomorrow. We'll get dinner and drive out." He motioned to the waiter.

"Check."

When Wanda sat down before her desk in the real estate office after leaving Teddy she put out of her mind her reservations regarding the coming party. "I always have been able to take care of myself in every situation so far," she thought. "Besides it's a business proposition with me and means a lot of money."

Nevertheless, when Teddy and she finished dinner and she settled beside him in his car she found herself curious about the approaching adventure. She forbore questioning Teddy about it. It rather was like going to a play.

Two hours later, Teddy turned into a driveway and assisted Wanda to alight. "It used to be a boat-club." He nodded toward a building that loomed dark and forbidding before her. She could hear the lap of water and could make out dimly a stretch of Long Island Sound. Teddy mounted a short flight of stairs that led to a veranda and inserted a key. He opened a door and switched on lights. Wanda found herself in a typical club room with easy chairs and divans placed about and a fireplace in which smouldered a log fire. There was a man here who Teddy introduced simply as "Glenn." He looked at Wanda with a dubious expression. He stirred the logs and they burst into a ruddy flame. Wanda took off her coat, hat and furs and settled in a chair. She gazed silently into the fire.

Glenn sat down beside her and offered a cigarette. "Must have been a comfortable club," he remarked with forced cheerfulness.

Wanda surveyed him from the corner of her eyes. She put him down as the gigolo type, not averse to having a woman pay the dinner check or maybe even the rent. She felt simply indifferent toward him. Broad shoulders, trim waist line, even white teeth, black hair so painstakingly combed, and his trick of lifting one eyebrow left her cold.

The crunch of gravel beneath the wheels of a car followed by the sound of brakes being applied to several other cars caused her to tighten momentarily her fingers on the arms of her chair.

Five men and six women entered the room. They seemed to be in their thirties although a couple of the men were evidently forty or slightly over. One girl looked to be about twenty-five. The way she walked up to Teddy and kissed him made Wanda identify her as his girl.

Teddy introduced them all to her and Glenn. He called them by their first names. They accepted the introductions conventionally although with more curiosity than would be usual at an ordinary party.

Teddy had hung Wanda's wraps in a closet and the men put the women's and their own coats in the same place. Teddy disappeared to procure ice and liquor from the kitchen while one of the men tuned in the radio.

A man held out his arms to Wanda. "May I?" he asked. She nodded and they danced properly enough. When the piece came to an end he offered her a drink. She accepted.

"Shall we dance again?" he asked politely. He kept up a flow of small talk. Another man tapped his shoulder and he surrendered Wanda to him.

"I hope that you will enjoy our crowd, my dear." The man smiled at her. "You will find us very considerate of your feelings. I hope you will look at us and at the evening as simply ultra modern."

"I have found it tame enough so far."

"Well, we wouldn't want to shock such a beautiful and charming lady. I am dreadfully anxious to kiss you though."

"If you don't mind I would rather you didn't—just now."

"It is your prerogative to command, my dear. Your word is law, no matter how delectable we may consider you."

Another man cut in. The man danced closely but not objectionably. Wanda began wondering how long the propriety would continue. She observed the first break, when one of the men escorted his partner over to the fireplace. He drew her down on his lap and began kissing her. They glued their lips together and the man's hands caressed the woman's body. She caught Wanda's eye. "Come over here, my dear," she called. Wanda's escort released her and she walked over to the couple.

"This is Andrew in case you have forgotten. He's been raving about you. He pets me but thinks of you. We are not jealous here. I thought perhaps you might be kind to Andrew and take my place." She slid off the man's lap.

Wanda felt slightly embarrassed in spite of herself. She had no desire to sit on the man's lap. On the other hand she had come to the party determined to play the game.

"Please do," Andrew took her hand. "Let me turn the chair around. Then you can rest comfortably in my arms while we

watch the others."

She did not resist as he gently pulled her toward the chair. As she sank on his knees he put his arms about her and kissed her. She responded to the kiss in somewhat the same way that she would have gotten out her notebook and pencil if Miss Schmidt at the office had asked her to take a letter. This was her job just the same as taking Miss Schmidt's dictation.

Wanda's returning the man's kiss had an immediate effect upon everybody. Couples on the floor began fondling each other as they danced. A couple close to Wanda stopped dancing. Other couples followed their example. Some left the floor and retired to chairs and divans. The couples did not remain with each other. Both men and girls ran about from one to the other. Wanda was almost unconscious of what Andrew was doing, she was so startled at the behavior of the others.

In the morning she reeled, faint and exhausted, as she made her way to Teddy's car. She climbed in and he started back to town and business and sanity.

After a long time Teddy spoke. "Will you come again?"

"No, never." Wanda's lips set in a firm line.

They ate breakfast near Wanda's office. Teddy gave her the two hundred and fifty dollars. "I know that whether you come back or not that you won't tell anyone about last night."

"You can count on that. I feel ashamed, Teddy. I can't help but feel ashamed."

CHAPTER 11

Wanda leaned back in her new Windsor chair with its blue cushioned seat before her new mahogany secretary. She tapped one foot on her new blue and gold oriental rug and turned her chair so that it faced the window. She gazed at the Consolidated Gas Building's clock. Seven-thirty and she had the evening free, the first free evening in two weeks. She was tired. She really should have had May over. It had been a month since she had seen May. But she just wasn't equal to May tonight. There were too many friends whose

eyes pleaded for her time and strength.

Denis—he didn't complain verbally but his face registered disappointment and discontent. He was so unhappy about the way she spent the nights when she was not with him. Gradually he had fallen into the habit of going to May and pouring out his troubles. Poor May, listening to him rave about Wanda when she wanted him for herself. But May was playing her cards skillfully. She sympathized and made him comfortable.

May so often told Wanda about the evenings Denis spent with her. "He keeps praising you but I love you too much to be jealous of that. I keep telling him you like nice things and that it would be a shame for you to have to give them all up for a cheap, walk-up flat and poverty. Talking that way makes him feel sorry for you as well as himself. It makes me smile to think of him feeling sorry for you, you devil, with all the good times you have and going through life grinning and making wise-cracks. Some day that nut is going to wake up to the fact that I'm not so bad myself and that I'm right in reach of his arms."

Wanda smiled as she remembered the many times that May had repeated these things to her. Nor did she have any deep misgivings but that May eventually would succeed in getting Denis to marry her.

Van Dyke was a far greater problem to Wanda than Denis. Her acceptance of him was a financial mistake. All she was getting from him was the rent and money to gradually furnish the apartment. She had had quite a time persuading him that he should always let her know the day before whether he would be at the apartment or not. She had explained that she had friends who invited her to innocent parties and that it would be stupid of her to refuse such invitations and sit alone in the apartment waiting for him with no assurance that he would come to see her. He finally became accustomed to the arrangement and gave her the day's notice. He had broken the rule on two occasions with almost disastrous results.

Recently she had met, through Mrs. Jones, a man by the name of Torrey, with ample means, who wanted to get her an apartment or a house. Her acceptance of his proposal immediately would triple her income. Yet she couldn't quite force herself to break with Van Dyke. He had grown to love

her. He was so trustful, so assured that he meant everything to her as she did to him. His old selfish arrogance was gone. He was a romantic, impulsive, sentimental boy. Whenever Wanda contemplated telling him that she couldn't afford to remain his exclusive property she found herself looking into his blue trusting eyes and a surge of helplessness engulfed her. She would call him Boy and ask him to kiss her.

Wanda gazed wistfully out into the darkness studded with yellow window gleams. She shook her head. She knew she would not hurt Van Dyke. No, she wouldn't hurt Van Dyke, or Denis or May and that afternoon Gladys had telephoned her. They were to have lunch together the next day. Quite evidently Gladys wanted money and a slice of forbidden cake.

"I thought I was a lone wolf," Wanda mused. "Instead I find myself a shepherd dog worried about every lamb for fear it will stumble and hurt its little self. Ba, ba! I'm going to bed."

In ten minutes Wanda was asleep and it seemed almost less time than that when her small silver-toned clock tingled its disagreeable message. She opened her eyes and turned her head toward the pillow beside her. Unoccupied, she breathed with relief. She jumped up and dove for the shower. "Heavens," she danced as the cold water struck her, "life *can* be so sweet when no man's around."

She rubbed herself briskly with a big, heavy Turkish towel and ran to the living room window. She gulped big gobs of morning air. It was too high up for anyone to see her. She moved back from the window a little space and spread her legs apart and bent sideways and forward. She felt supple, peppy and happy.

Gladys came into the office at twelve-thirty. Wanda waved her to a seat. "I'll wash up and we'll go. You look pretty as a couple of pictures, Gladys."

"Thanks, Wanda, the same goes for you always."

"Reached a decision yet?" Wanda asked as they walked toward a tearoom.

"Yes. It's no use my trying to be one of the faithful unto death kind. I'm simply not made that way. I'm disgusted with myself but I can't help it."

"Somebody ought to talk to that Charlie of yours."

"Poor Charlie. I hate to think of him. You see, Wanda, Charlie pounds stories out on the old Underwood when he

gets home. He's so dog tired when he tumbles into bed that he's half asleep before he finishes giving me the little peck he calls a good night kiss. When he does take a night off we go to some party or other. Then he is more tired than ever when we get home. Of course I know, Wanda, that I have my nerve bringing my troubles to you this way."

"Nonsense, I'm glad you have. What's a friend for?"

"Couldn't you speak to that woman who runs the place where you meet men?"

"To tell the truth I already have. There's nothing doing there. She won't list you because your evenings aren't free."

"I might be able to get away from Charlie for one night. I could say that I was staying with you. Make some excuse. Do you know that in the two and a half years that we have been married we have never been apart once?"

"Charlie doesn't cheat then?"

"I think he has on two different occasions."

"Feel badly about it?"

"I did at the time but I didn't ask him about it."

"You've definitely made up your mind, Gladys?"

"Yes."

"I'll have to find you someone then. It may take several weeks. Suppose I should find a man for you and then you got cold feet and weren't willing to go through with it?"

"If he were young and not too horrid about it, I'm sure I wouldn't renege."

"I'll have to get back to the office, darling. I'll give you a ring before long. There's no danger of your falling in love and making matters worse rather than better?"

"I can't imagine my falling out of love with Charlie."

"Don't. Real love is a lot better than whatever satisfaction such a man will furnish."

Wanda typed two letters and looked dubiously at the last volume of Wells' "Outline of History." She had been reading it diligently. After finishing a chapter she made notes on what she had read in an endeavor to fix it in her mind. She reasoned that her real mastery of Mr. Wells' history would give her a better grasp of the subject than most high school and possibly college graduates who had spent many hours memorizing battle dates and kings' names. It was all part of a desire to hold her own when conversing with men. She tried to concentrate on the chapter she was reading but her

mind kept slipping back to Gladys.

"It may take a long time," she thought, "to find a man. Let me see, Teddy's out, Denis is out, George is out on account of Adeline, Van Dyke's out, Torrey's—? Why not Torrey?" Of course it would mean that Gladys would be competing with her. She could risk that. Torrey would be amused if she explained Gladys' peculiar position. She was pretty enough to please him. The whole idea would intrigue him. He had money and was just the sort that would suit Gladys. Wanda could picture Torrey laughing when she explained it all to him. Darn, she would do it. Maybe she could get a date with Torrey this week. She would explain it all to him and arrange for the two to meet. Torrey wasn't perfect. He was pretty self-centered. He was a gentleman, however, and would keep Gladys' secret. He could be trusted as much as any man. The question settled in Wanda's mind, she opened Wells' book—"The end of the eighteenth century was a period of disrupting empires and—"

Wanda glanced into a mirror in a shop window. That same man was still following her. She first had noticed him the day before when she went out to luncheon. She was aware of his looking at her and then lowering his eyes. It had impressed her because most men in catching her glance, involuntarily straightened up, conscious of themselves as males. Very frequently a hand would stray to a necktie or pull at some part of his clothing. This man gave the impression of not wanting her to notice him. She forgot about him until she left the restaurant and saw him loitering across the street. She had put him down as one of the many men that annoy women and girls on New York streets. He had followed her back to the office.

So, he was going to follow her again today. Wanda stopped dead in her tracks. The man continued toward her, a bit too casual in the way he moved along. She sensed that she had been incorrect in thinking of him as a mere wolfish male. When he got abreast of her she put out her hand.

"Wait a minute." Her eyes travelled over his round, ruddy face, his cheaply cut business suit down to his square-toed, black shoes. "Maybe I can save you some trouble. Why are you following me?"

"I'm not following you, lady."

"No? I just noticed it yesterday. Been following me long?"

"I'm not following you, lady."

"I thought you were a flirt at first and wasn't going to pay any attention. You aren't that. What's the big idea?"

"You're mistaken, lady."

"Call me something else, will you? You're getting monotonous. Listen, I'm going to a tearoom for lunch. Then back to the office. At five-thirty I go to my apartment. Probably you know where that is already. I expect to remain there until eight-thirty tomorrow morning. Then I'll walk to my office. I always eat lunch at twelve-thirty. Why not go home to bed and follow me to lunch again tomorrow? If you'll take my word for what I've told you you will have twenty-four hours to do something else in."

The man looked at her helplessly. Wanda stared at him for a moment and then shrugged and turned toward the restaurant. When she finished luncheon and came out of the tearoom she walked for a block briskly and then suddenly turned around. He was a half block behind her. She waved at him and continued on her way.

During the afternoon she puzzled about it a good deal. Once she went to the door of the office, it was on the street level, and looked for him. He was standing across the street several doors down the block. No one was in the office at the time and she telephoned to Mrs. Jones.

"A man has been following me for a couple of days. He isn't the flirtatious type. He's shadowing me and I'm sure that he is a detective."

"Let me think, my dear," Mrs. Jones' voice was calm. "Are you sure it isn't someone employed by Mr. V.'s father?"

"I hadn't thought of that. I'm seeing V. tonight. I'll have a talk with him."

"You had better. Phone me if you need help. Torrey likes you and could easily help you. To tell the truth I think V. is too young. A son like that is guarded pretty carefully."

"I suppose he is. Poor kid, it will hurt him if we have to break up."

"You can't afford to be sentimental, my dear. Use your head. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. Thank you."

Wanda found herself that evening glancing quite frequently at the Gas Building's illuminated clock. Van Dyke

had told her that he would come around at seven-thirty. At one minute to nine she heard his key in the lock.

"You're late," she panted as his arms squeezed her.

"Had a devil of a time getting away from the governor. Asked me where I was going and when I said to see a girl he asked who she was. Never knew him to take that much interest in my affairs before."

"Boy, those checks that your father gives you, have you always cashed them first as I told you?"

"Well, no, I haven't. Once or twice I guess I endorsed them over for the rent. You don't think my folks know about us?"

"Sure they do. They have a man shadowing me, too."

"They have? I'll soon put a stop to that. I'll tell the governor about you and confess that we love each other."

"And what then?"

"Heck, I'll bet he's had a mistress or two in his day. I beg pardon, Wanda girl. I didn't mean that you were my mistress."

"But I am."

"Still, it's different. I really love you. You're no common—no common woman. Why, you're swell. Look how you have encouraged me to study. The way I was going, before I met you, I never would have passed any of my studies. You know that you have had a good influence on me."

"Yes, I think that I have done you a lot of good. Convincing your family of it might be difficult, however."

"I would like my father to meet you. Why, you're a lady."

"Thank you. For the scion of one of New York's oldest Dutch families to call me that is pretty nice."

"Do you mind if I tell the governor about us?"

Wanda's brow knitted in thought. "He knows about it already. Maybe it wouldn't do any harm to have it out with him. Don't lose your temper, though, and make what he would consider rash statements."

"I'll talk to him tomorrow afternoon. I'll make him see my viewpoint."

"Don't you think," Wanda spoke softly, "that maybe it would be better and save trouble if you, if we, broke off our affair?"

"You can't mean it! Don't you love me? How can you say that?"

"Dearest, I'm thinking of you. Some day you are going to

handle millions. You'll be expected to marry some nice debutante and raise a family."

He came over and knelt before her, searching her eyes. "I haven't been fair to you. What must you think of me? Dear, will you marry me?"

"Don't say that. You know you don't mean it."

"But I do. We'll get married tomorrow."

"We can't. You're under age."

"We can go to Maryland and lie about how old we are. Then, once married, the governor can't do a thing."

"How much do you love me, Boy dear?"

"Nobody ever loved anybody so much. I want you to give me those children you were talking about."

"Silly, sentimental boy." She ran her fingers through his blond hair. "Your father would disinherit you."

"No, he wouldn't. Besides, if he did there are several hundred thousands of dollars in trust for me from an uncle. When I'm twenty-one I get that money anyway. Don't you see that if you marry me it settles everything?"

"Your father would be here the next morning with his check book asking me how much I wanted to have the marriage annulled. No, I can't do it to you, Boy. I'll earn my money honestly—or what I consider honest."

"Please!"

"What do you know about me, dear? You met me at Mrs. Jones'. Such things can't be ignored. I know I'm fundamentally as worthy as most of the girls in your set, but it just wouldn't work. Besides, my ambitions are not social and I can make my pile without tricking your folks into paying me off."

"Tricking them? I'm asking you to marry me."

"Yes, but if I accept, knowing what I do, it would be tricking them. By the way, yours is my first proposal. It is rather nice. Get up. We have the evening together. Let's forget all these horrible things like family, society, and gum-shoes shadowing Wanda."

"I wish you would marry me," he said slowly.

"Boy, I'll tell you something that you can always remember. You are the sweetest, nicest boy in all the world."

"And you're my wife, my girl wife. Whether you marry me or not that is the way I think of you now."

"Are you trying to make me cry, Boy dear? You are such a darling."

CHAPTER 12

Wanda parted with Van Dyke the next morning without either of them reaching any decision concerning their problem. Van Dyke decided to delay having a talk with his father. He might confess his desire to marry Wanda with the result that his father would seek her out and persuade her more strongly than ever against it.

Wanda's shadow was lurking across the street when she stepped out of the apartment house. He followed her to lunch and lingered about until she left the restaurant. A half block behind, he trailed her back to her office.

She had persuaded Van Dyke that it might pacify his father if he remained at home that evening. She already had made an engagement with Torrey. She knew that she would be followed when she went to his apartment and that her remaining there all night would be grimly recorded. She was tempted to break the engagement. To do so would help only temporarily. Sooner or later her affair with Van Dyke was sure to be broken up by the boy's father. In the meanwhile, she might lose Torrey. She could not afford that. He was the logical man for her to tie to when such a break came.

Wanda felt that she was doing all she reasonably could to keep Van Dyke from being hurt. She felt a deep tenderness toward him. Their relationship had been so far from anything sordid. She had a fresh, clean feeling about it. She did not love him. His love-making often wearied her. Even his conversation, if taken in too large doses, bored her.

She had sacrificed a good deal for him in money and energy. She was hopeful that they might part without disillusionment and bitterness on his part. She would be unhappy permanently married to him and he was not strong enough to stand up under the barrage of criticism such a marriage would invoke.

She could marry him and accept a large check from his father to consent to its annulment. To do so would cause

pain and soil something fine in the boy. She couldn't and wouldn't do that. She and her shadow drifted over to the palatial apartment.

Hamilton Torrey's penthouse on Park Avenue was presided over by a soft-spoken, veiled-eyed Japanese servant. It was he who arranged the bottle of champagne in napkin and ice, the squabs from which every bone had been removed and in which a knife sank as though in butter, the crisp hothouse strawberries, the solid silver and crystal, the Venetian lace tablecloth.

Hamilton Torrey possessed exquisite table manners, his love-making refined to a point of ritual. A globe trotter, he had known women of every land and clime.

"Have you ever thought, Hamilton, of love?" Wanda asked, as they were eating. "A nice girl and a wedding ring and babies?"

"So even you dream of such things. I'm disappointed. I thought that we were kindred spirits, pirates in search of a trim craft to board and ravish."

"You're a sort of pirate, I suppose. Swooping down on proud ships and leaving desolate empty hulls to sink or float despondently."

"I'm afraid that your picture isn't quite correct. As a rule, they use my check for new paint and sail on, posting a mate up in the crow's nest to hopefully search for another pirate. I can't imagine you, Wanda, as a desolate hull despondently drifting."

"No, no man can do that to me, I don't believe. Only age can. Age may find me like that with no harbor to put into."

"You aren't proposing to me by any chance, are you?"

"I'm not wasting my breath. In fact, I rather enjoy the open sea myself. By the way, if you want to talk for a while longer I have a proposition to make to you."

"Ready for me to set up that apartment, you mean?"

"No, not yet. Wait a month or two. Give me a chance to wiggle out of my present entanglements. Sooner or later I'll want you to take care of me. I hope you'll wait."

"You're worth waiting for, providing we have enough evenings like this together in the meanwhile. What is your proposition?"

"You occasionally take a flyer in married women, don't you?"

"Yes, when they insist, but I rather steer clear of them as a rule."

"This girl is built as I am, only on a little larger scale. She's older, in her late twenties. She's refined and has intelligence. Her husband is poor and she needs money. She can't get away nights but is free in the daytime. Since her marriage she has been true to him and she loves him. He's a nice fellow, too."

"I don't quite get you."

"I want to help her out, Hamilton. She needs the money and even more than that she needs attention. Her husband works so hard that he lacks pep."

"Have I got to woo her first? You know, suppers and beg for the first kiss and that junk?"

"Nope, she'll come here. Remember, she is a lady and inexperienced. Just be your usual charming self."

"Sounds all right but I'm not at all anxious to have a love-sick maiden on my hands six months from now."

"I'll warn her of that. Don't forget she loves her husband."

"Well, if you say so. When can she come here?"

"Make it the afternoon of the day after tomorrow. That will give me a chance to talk to her."

"Gosh, I'm kind of scared, Wanda, and all goose pimples. Tomorrow afternoon, I wish it were today. Poor Charlie, I mustn't think about that, though. How shall I act and what shall I say?"

"Well, you have the apartment number. The boy downstairs will phone up your name and you'll be told to go right up to his penthouse. You buzz his bell and he opens the door. You say, 'I'm Gladys,' and he says, 'My dear, I'm so glad you came.' He offers you a cocktail and you say, 'Thank you.' He waves you to a chair and you sit down. He says, 'Pardon a trite remark and an unnecessary one, but you are very beautiful and charming.' You thank him, blushing if possible. You talk for a few minutes and he tells you of a new dance record he has just secured. 'May I?' he asks, bowing like a movie star. You answer, 'I would love to hear it.' He puts it on and holds out his arms. You go to him and dance quite properly. When the piece comes to an end the automatic switch cuts the phonograph off so you don't have to worry about that. You stand there with his arms about you. He bends and

kisses you. From there on, it's up to you."

"I'm glad of that! Thank heavens I met you at Monte's party. I'll never cease to thank you, Wanda."

Gladys tried to be nonchalant as she gave her name to the uniformed boy at the switchboard. She thanked him with a thumping heart as he told her that she was to go right to Mr. Torrey's apartment.

She swallowed a couple of times before she pressed the little button outside of his apartment. The door swung open. "I'm Gladys," she said mechanically.

"I'm so glad you came, dear lady. Won't you come in? May I help you with your wraps? My man is out. A cocktail? Sit down, please. Wanda told me about you but I was not quite prepared for such a beautiful visitor."

"Thank you." Gladys could not quite manage to blush.

"I was out shopping this morning and heard a new record. Do you mind if I play it for you?"

"I would love to hear it." For a moment suspicion flashed into Gladys' mind that Mr. Torrey and Wanda had rehearsed the scene. It was running so true to form. Yet, he probably had learned that such was the most graceful approach. She could not help smiling when he turned from the phonograph and held out his arms to her. She was glad that she was a good dancer.

"It's worth repeating," he remarked when the selection came to an end. He went over and turned the music on again. When the dance finished he kept his arms about her, as she expected. "You are delightful." He bent and kissed her with a slight intake of his breath that made her think of a bee sipping honey in a flower. His fingers moved to the snaps on her dress. The little panic that stirred her was a delight to her. He pulled the dress down gently and caressed her white shoulders. Gently, firmly, he kept kissing her. His inquiring hands tingled her. She longed for him to lead her quickly into the other room. She did not want to wait. She was fiercely happy and unashamed. She kept thinking, "It is only two o'clock. There will be hours of this." When he drew slightly away from her to remove his coat she felt giddy and swayed slightly. He reached for her, "Sweet dear." She tried to steady her thoughts. She could not tell if she was being carried or if she was walking toward a door. A languor seized her, followed by a tremendous awakening of

every nerve in her. She groaned in a delirium of boundless, spaceless happiness.

Wanda, for one of the few times in her life, had a headache. It hardly was to be wondered at with Dennis begging continually for a date and Van Dyke insisting upon being with her every night. May calling with a hurt expression. "It's been almost two months. Can you get away from that Van Dyke chap?" Gladys demanding every lunch hour and worrying her because she looked so much in love. Torrey pleading for a date and complaining that she had got him in a mess. "Gladys is a fine girl but she's so intense." Detectives following her—and to cap the climax her boss had to fall in love and was giving up her business to get married!

There was some talk of Miss Betts, one of the saleswomen, taking over the business. Wanda knew that the place would be very different under Miss Betts' stern direction. About forty, Miss Betts wore sensible shoes and a mannish felt hat. Her brown hair was turning grey, her complexion had a greyish tinge, her whole appearance seemed grey. She looked as if she needed dusting.

Miss Betts eventually did buy out the business and Wanda gave up her cigarette during business hours, her reading of a book during leisurely afternoons and the agreeable talk fests with various Villagers who dropped in. Wanda resigned at the end of three weeks.

Miss Betts received Wanda's resignation with a firm statement indicating that Wanda was both lazy and a fool. Wanda accepted the statement with a smile and typed a strong recommendation of herself that made no mention of laziness or that she was a fool. She mailed it to her former employer for signature. She spent her first day of freedom on what Torrey called a picnic. It was an antless picnic because they ate luncheon at a tearoom near Peekskill and dinner at an inn in Newburg. Gladys was along as Torrey's girl and a friend of Torrey's by the name of Ronnie Gardner sat in the back seat with Wanda.

At eight o'clock they were back in New York again and Wanda climbed Gladys' stairs with her so that she could apologize to Charlie for keeping his wife out all day. Charlie wanted Wanda to stay and have a drink and spend the evening. She said she would providing Van Dyke was not at her

apartment waiting for her. She telephoned and found that Van Dyke was not at the apartment but that an elderly gentleman had been waiting to see her for over an hour. She told the telephone operator to tell the gentleman to wait and that she would be over.

Wanda eyed the man with considerable misgivings.

"It is a personal matter that I wish to see you about," the man announced.

She curbed an impulse to say that most men desired to see her about a personal matter and invited him up to her apartment.

She motioned to him to be seated and passed him a cigarette.

"It's about Mr. Van Dyke," the man cleared his throat.

"So I imagined."

"I am instructed by my client, Mr. Van Dyke, senior, to inform you that it is felt that—er—present arrangements ha—must not continue."

"The ash tray is right beside you, Mr.—?"

"Travers is my name, Miss Fulton."

"Mr. Travers, you appear somewhat uncomfortable. You need not. Certainly, I feel no resentment against you."

"Thank you, Miss Fulton. In fact, I am rather unpleasantly situated. My agents have been investigating you, at Mr. Van Dyke's instigation, I assure you. They are aware that you have other men acquaintances besides Mr. Van Dyke's son."

"Would it have made any difference if I hadn't?"

"Possibly not, except that it fortunately—unfortunately, gives Mr. Van Dyke a certain advantage. In fact he is unwilling to pay anything."

"I hadn't intended asking Mr. Van Dyke to pay anything, Mr. Travers."

"Might I inquire then, if I may be so bold, as to what your intentions are regarding the young man?"

"He has asked me to marry him."

Mr. Travers' face paled slightly. "Perhaps I came at a very opportune time. I did not realize that the regrettable arrangements had developed to such serious possibilities."

"Regrettable, Mr. Travers? I don't know how well you know young Van Dyke. He's a splendid boy. When I first met him he was arrogant, selfish and spoiled, a typical rich man's son. Underneath I saw sufficient character to build upon. I've

done a lot more for him than his father succeeded in doing."

"Then perhaps you should be congratulated on your influence, Miss Fulton. Be that as it may," Mr. Travers' voice became apologetically stern, "I am compelled to convey my client's desires. He told me to demand that you immediately cease seeing young Mr. Van Dyke and that you sever all connections with him."

"And if I don't consent?"

"He will turn you over to the police as a dissolute character."

The suggestion of a sneer came over Wanda's face. She could quite understand why Van Dyke's father was so successful. Most men would have tried to buy her off with a check. Van Dyke was clever enough to know that a word from him and she would find herself inside a well-locked cell. For a moment she was tempted to marry Van Dyke and make his father sing a different tune. She turned to Mr. Travers.

"Van Dyke has been pleading with me for months to marry him, Mr. Travers. You tempt me to do it when you make so plain his father's attitude. The truth is I don't want to hurt young Van Dyke. The boy is in love with me. He's young and idealistic. As a matter of fact, he hasn't been able to support me in the style to which I am accustomed." Wanda smiled. "You're a lawyer and a bright man, what have you to suggest?"

"If he learned that when he was not here you spent nights with other men it would cure him of his infatuation, don't you think?" Mr. Travers' eyes took on a crafty look.

"You would like to kid me into being very noble. As a matter of fact it would do him immeasurable injury. You convince him that I'm not the fine sort he thinks I am and that I have two-timed him and he'll take it out in skipping classes, drinking liquor and seeing women far worse for him than I have been. If you have the boy's interests at heart you had better persuade his father of the truth of what I'm telling you."

"What have you to suggest, then?"

"Where is he now?"

"I honestly don't know, Miss Fulton. I've been nervous ever since I've been here for fear he would storm in."

"I'll turn the latch on the door so that his key won't unlock it. Then if he comes, while I'm letting him in, you can hide

under the bed."

Mr. Travers blushed and then smiled faintly. "I appreciate the way you are taking all this."

"Thanks. My suggestion is that you do nothing until he comes to see me. When he does I'll tell him of your visit at his father's orders. He'll storm and rage, poor kid. I'll tell him that if he really loves me his love will last for a year. During that year he is not to write a line or telephone or see me. If at the end of the year he still wants to marry me, then I'll be willing to talk to him about it. Meanwhile his dad will succeed in weaning him away from me without doubt. The boy will suffer for a while but he's young and will get over it. The only thing I hope is that old fool that sent you won't mud-rake me."

"I'll convey your message to Mr. Van Dyke. I believe that he will agree."

"I take it for granted that Mr. Van Dyke will not have me molested in any way. If he does he will be sorry. He would be doing his son harm. I've helped his son and been a good influence on him. He couldn't understand that. Thank you, Mr. Travers. I promise to break this thing up. As a matter of fact, I can't afford to make any more sacrifices for the boy, sweet and dear as he is."

"Good night, Miss Fulton. Thank you. May I say that I quite—yes—admire you?"

"You may. S'long."

CHAPTER 13

Wanda stood facing the closed door of her apartment. It had been more difficult than she had feared. With the back of her hand she rubbed at the tears on her cheeks. She straightened as she saw the door handle move. "You shouldn't have come back, Boy."

"I couldn't help it. When I thought that it would be a whole year and realized that you were still here right behind the door, just as I had left you. I had to come back to see you

once more."

"The year will go. If we marry now your father will resent it terribly and feel certain I'm a designing gold-digger. If we wait a year and you keep on with your studies and show your grit and stability he will be reconciled to the idea."

"But a whole year! Why need I be tortured for three hundred and sixty-five days of anxiety and wanting you. I can't see you, I can't telephone and hear your voice. I can't even write to you. You may get sick and die even and I won't know it."

"Nothing will happen to me. I'm young and strong. I'm staying right here at this apartment. Marriage is such a big thing. To live together all our lives is such a long time. Surely we can wait a year."

"A year is a long time. I can't do it, Wanda."

"Now, now, dear, yes you can. I'll be right here waiting for you and if you want I'll marry you just exactly three hundred and sixty-five days from this minute."

"If I want to! You believe I'll want to, more than anything I've ever wanted, don't you? Tell me."

"Yes, dear. Be brave and square your shoulders and play the game so I'll be proud when you come back."

"One more kiss."

"There, there, honey. Good-bye. Don't get drunk now. That's kiddish. I'm betting on you. Smile, darn it."

He smiled with his youthful face so full of unhappiness that she felt like pulling him onto her lap and babying him as though he were her son. She stood smiling encouragement as he backed toward the door. He kept looking at her as he pulled the door slowly shut. She tip-toed to the door and listened. She sighed as she heard him turn toward the elevators.

"Poor kid," she thought half angrily, "so sure he'll want me a year from now. His father will throw all kinds of silly debutantes with scheming mothers at him and he'll fall for their flattery. Well, I got what I wanted, my freedom."

The telephone rang. She hesitated to answer it. It might be Van Dyke. "If he's weak enough to call me!"

"This is May, Wanda. Denis and I are here at my apartment. How did you come out with your boy friend?"

"Oh, all right, I guess. He's gone."

"I thought I would call you. Denis here sends his best."

"Yes, why don't you two come over for a while?"

"Gee, swell, may we? We'll be right over."

Wanda hung up the receiver. "Now what the hell did I say that for? I must be going soft and want sympathy. I don't. I would rather go to bed."

"It's all furnished, the whole apartment," May exclaimed. "It's ducky. Isn't it, Denis?"

"I should say." He kept hold of Wanda's hand, which she had extended to him in greeting and then with a side glance at May, kissed her.

"Sit down, both of you, and tell me what you have been doing since I saw you last."

"Movies, sitting in the apartment and talking. That's about all," May answered.

"Quite domestic, you two. How are George and Adeline?"

"We've been over for dinner a couple of times. George still likes to cook. May I go out and get some ice and stuff for drinks?" May did not wait for Wanda's permission. She caught Wanda's eye on her way to the kitchen and nodded her head in Denis' direction.

"How has it been going, Denis?"

"Pretty good except that I started to paint a tree Sunday and you got all mixed up in it."

"Why not mix May up in it a little?"

"Wanda, is there any chance for me now that Van Dyke is out of the picture?"

"Only as a friend, Denis. I am keeping this place as a sort of resting nook but a friend is setting up another apartment for me. I might as well be frank."

"Sometimes I wish, Wanda, that there were no nights to remember. There are only three. You were so wonderful to me then that I just keep on hoping."

"I've told you before, Denis, how it is with me. I'm simply not the marrying kind. I don't love you and I can't imagine myself caring that way for any man. I like you tremendously. Your trouble is that you have built up a complex about me. You know I won't marry you so you work yourself up into a sweat about it."

"You're so damned intriguing and the only girl I've ever had."

"That's where you are acting foolish."

He glanced toward the kitchen. "I don't know why I haven't tried with May."

"I'm sure I don't either. The girl likes you. You're missing a lot, Denis."

"Wouldn't you care?"

"What if I did? I don't. May's worth ten of me to you. She can learn to love you and you'll have a wonderful girl. I can't."

"If I had the least hope that you could care for me, I wouldn't touch any girl in the world."

"That's interesting. If you want to save yourself go to it, but it certainly puts no glamour about you as far as I am concerned, Denis dear."

"Here's the liquor, my lord. Drink." May bowed low before Denis. Her dress fell slightly forward. Denis' eyes could hardly keep from seeing, beneath the yoke, the snow-white breasts. As she straightened up she glanced at Wanda and one eye slowly closed and opened again.

"How long has this been going on?" Wanda asked.

"What?" May asked.

"Calling Denis 'my lord'," Wanda answered with apparent innocence.

"It's not the first time I called him 'my lord'."

"Why, May, I never remember you calling me that before."

"You just didn't notice."

Fifteen minutes later Denis rose to go. "Not leaving already?" Wanda asked.

May looked surprised but got up with alacrity.

"You must be tired," Denis explained.

"I am a bit. Sorry I have only the davenport here and no extra bedroom."

She walked with them to the elevator.

At a quarter after eight the next morning Wanda answered the telephone. It was May. "I was afraid maybe you had already gone."

"Nope, loafing today. Tomorrow I have a date to see a man about a job uptown I think I can get. How are you?"

"Wanda, it happened. Last night. I'll bet you said something that made him. What did you say?"

"Me? Nothing much. Funny how dumb most men are. Glad he got wise to himself. Don't forget to lead him on. They still are issuing licenses downtown."

"As if I could forget that. I think last night was a step in that direction. If I don't land him it won't be because I haven't tried. It was swell last night, Wanda."

"So! Run along to work now, kid. I think I'll give you a bedroom set for your wedding gift."

"You would think of that."

"The men won't let me forget it. Bye, darling."

"Bye."

Wanda secured the position uptown. She did not like it nearly as well as the office in the Village but the work was not difficult. She accepted an apartment from Torrey on Fifth Avenue facing the park. It was a gorgeous place and quite evidently had been occupied by Torrey's former mistress. She had no illusions about Torrey. A stock broker, he was a typical man about town. He attended first nights, was addressed by name by the head waiters and his card opened stars' dressing room doors. He enjoyed taking a well-known actress to dinner in some swanky place even if she bestowed no greater favors upon him than the privilege of paying the dinner check. He was good-looking, likeable and polished. He also was cynical, self-centered and with no deep sentiment or tenderness.

He frankly called himself a connoisseur of women. He looked upon life as a treasure chest full of jewels, rich spices, and ruby and purple wines—treasures of women, rich food and drink. He really did not care about anything else. Even his business and money were only means to provide that which made possible his delving into this chest. He delighted in Wanda's clothes and brought her to shops on Fifth and Madison Avenues where he purchased lavishly. Wanda accepted the clothes, the occasional necklace or ring and the money that he left on the mantel-piece, dresser top or even flung upon a chair. She knew that as long as he was interested that he would give and that when his gifts lessened the end was drawing near. He bought her a car and paid for its storage and care at the garage for six months in advance. "He thinks we will last for six months anyway," was Wanda's secret thought.

Gladys occasionally ate luncheon with Wanda. She confessed that Torrey was seeing her about one afternoon a week. Wanda felt no jealousy nor did she look upon Gladys as a competitor. She usually could tell when Torrey had spent

some time with Gladys. That evening he would want to take her to the theatre or a movie, and leave immediately afterward; or he would settle down and read a book from Wanda's ever-increasing library. Occasionally he would lay the book aside for a minute and make some comment and ask what she thought. A discussion generally followed. Frequently he would ask Wanda to sing something for him and accompany her on the piano. Friendly, companionable evenings that Wanda genuinely enjoyed.

Torrey was at his best on such occasions. He had a keen, well-informed mind. Many an hour Wanda sat poring over books, trying to make up for the deficiencies of her education. It was not altogether because she wanted to hold Torrey as long as she could. It was partly pride. She could not bear to feel inferior to anyone.

Wanda thought about Gladys a good deal. She felt that the girl had a problem and that her knowing Torrey was not solving it. She was still unsatisfied. Wanda marvelled at the will-power that she must have displayed to keep true to Charlie as long as she had.

Gladys told Wanda that Torrey gave her from twenty to fifty dollars each time they were together. "He usually says, 'Here's a deposit for the First National,' and then sticks it in my stocking."

"Doesn't Charlie wonder where you get money?"

"He thinks I'm a wonderful manager. Wanda, I want to ask you something that I'm afraid you will think is awful nervy."

"Spill it, I'm listening."

"I want you to telephone me Sunday morning and invite me to spend the day over at your apartment so that Hamilton, you and I can be together. I'll put Charlie on the phone and he'll consent if you ask him. He likes you."

"Do you think that is quite fair to Charlie, Gladys?"

"Yes, because he will write all day anyway. I guess it isn't fair to you, though. I suppose you are surprised at my asking you to do it."

"It's none of my business what you do or don't do to Charlie. It might be that he would feel hurt if I didn't ask him. Besides, he should have a little fun now and then. Why don't you and he take a Sunday off and go on the boat to Atlantic Highlands? It's warm enough for a swim."

"Charlie would have a fit if he couldn't spend the day working on his novel. It isn't that he doesn't love me. As long as he knew I was with you he would feel I was all right."

"Gladys, where is this going to end?"

"What going to end?" Gladys tossed her head a bit defiantly.

"You won't be offended if I tell you of a conversation Mrs. Jones and I had once?"

"No."

"She said that the most difficult thing a girl could be was a naughty *lady*. You've seen that look that a lot of girls get. It isn't that they dress more flamboyantly or rouge more heavily. It is simply a coarseness plus something else that changes them. Have I offended you?"

"You think it's coarse of me to seek an invitation to meet Hamilton at your place?"

"No, I am worried about you, though. Where will this end?"

"But it's such fun, Wanda. I'll admit that it means everything to me and that I think about it all the time. Do I show it?"

Wanda studied Gladys' face. "No, but confess that if you knew another Torrey that you would date him too, even if there was no money in it."

"I suppose I would. Still, men often try to flirt with me on the street and I pass them up. I do want to be a—a lady. I couldn't bear to be cheap."

"Hell, Gladys, I'm no person to preach. I've got an awful habit of feeling responsible for people I like. I'll suggest your coming Sunday to Torrey's. If he's agreeable, and I suppose he will be, I'll telephone you."

"Maybe you had better not. Forget it."

"No, I'll do it. There is no selfishness in back of the apparent hesitation I expressed. I don't mind your relationship with Torrey."

Wanda telephoned Gladys Sunday morning. Torrey had made a few feeble protests when she broached the subject of Gladys coming over. Wanda was suspicious that Gladys and he had talked it over beforehand. She noted that he made no move to dress when she told him that Gladys would be over in an hour. Following his example, Wanda did not dress either.

When Gladys arrived Torrey turned on the phonograph.

He danced first with Wanda and then with Gladys. Wanda went into the kitchen to fix the inevitable drinks. She felt slightly bored. If Gladys had not come Torrey would have suggested a ride up the Hudson or over on Long Island with dinner at some pleasant tearoom or resort hotel. Now there would be drinking and goodness knows what else.

"Ah, something cooling," Torrey exclaimed as Wanda came in with the Tom Collins.

"Gladys," Wanda invited, "why not come into the bedroom and put on a dressing gown? Maybe we can find a pair of pajamas that will fit, too."

"Thanks. Excuse us, Hamilton. It was awfully good of you to have me over." Gladys' eyes flashed with eagerness as Wanda hesitated between two dressing gowns and then tossed on the bed a glossy, almost transparent affair. She found a pair of pajamas.

"Take them home with you when you go, Gladys. They are a bit large for me."

"You precious!" Gladys hugged Wanda. "Isn't this fun? I love parties and we have a full day of it."

Wanda smiled sympathetically, thinking that Gladys was almost feverish with excitement. "This girl is going to get in one awful mess some day," she thought.

In the living room again they sipped their Tom Collins' and talked. Torrey's face expressed unexcited contentment. He was interested in Gladys' eagerness. He understood Wanda. As long as he treated her well and gave her money she did not care how many women he had. As for Gladys, it was good entertainment, a pleasant way to spend a Sunday, to study her and observe where her intensity would lead her.

They spent several hours in talk. They discussed books, cars, and now and then flitted to sex. Torrey guided the conversation and Wanda felt that he deliberately brought up sex and as deliberately shunted it off for some other topic. Each time, however, she felt that he said something a bit bolder. He's testing her, she realized, bringing her up right to the point of some sort of avowal and then switching the conversation.

On one occasion Gladys had said, "I think fidelity is silly."

Torrey turned to Wanda. "Darling, I wish you would teach Gladys that dance of yours."

"It's pretty intimate to be danced with someone else, isn't

it?"

"Don't be like that, Wanda. It isn't your nature to be a kill-joy."

"As you say, Hamilton. Maybe you had better take off your dressing gown, Gladys." She removed her own. "You just do everything I do."

Wanda turned on the phonograph and looked over at Torrey. He grinned at her. She shrugged. "Give me your hand, Gladys. Now do as I do."

In the midst of the dance, Gladys stopped. "Please, Wanda, I can't stand it."

"For goodness sake, Hamilton, stop torturing the girl. If you don't mind, I am going to take the roadster and go for a ride."

Torrey seized her hand. "Don't go. I want you to stay."

"No, don't be silly."

"No, he wants you to stay, Wanda. Please do it."

"I would rather not."

"Excuse me, Gladys, I want to talk to Wanda."

"You don't have to, of course, my dear," he whispered. "You will please me if you do and I'll buy you a little present."

"Very well, Hamilton. As long as I'm your woman I'll do anything within reason to please."

There was only one thing that Wanda's mind dwelled upon when two hours later she stepped under the shower. She had trained herself to erase from her mind all memory of passion's disports when they were over. She felt that with the soap and swishing water they went down the drain and vanished. She did let herself remember one strange expression on Gladys' face. Her brow knitted into a frown. She stored this knowledge away for possible future use.

CHAPTER 14

"Buzz—z—" Somebody had his nerve coming to her door without being announced. Wanda closed the book she was reading with a resigned gesture.

"Bill!"

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Thank heavens."

"What on earth are you doing with those suitcases? What's the big idea? What's in them. Bill, I told you to phone me when you wanted a date. You can't break in on me this way."

"Listen, Wanda, I haven't much time. Those bags have a half million dollars in large denominations in them. . . . Don't look at me like that. I'm not crazy, not yet, at any rate."

"Sit down, Bill, and I'll get you a drink."

"No, I don't want a drink."

Wanda walked over to one of the bags and unfastened the catches on either side. Silently, Bill threw her a key-ring with two keys. She tried one. It didn't fit. She tried the other and turned the lock. She lifted the cover and gasped. The bag was packed solid with bills.

"The other bag, too?" She pointed.

He nodded. "I tell you there is just a few dollars less than a half million in those two bags. I near broke my arms carrying them."

"Money is a burden. Well, well, a half million dollars. Are you sure, Bill, that you aren't crazy or that I'm not?"

"It's no joking matter." He reached for a cigarette. "The last plunge in the stock market wiped me out." His lighted match trembled back and forth before his cigarette.

"Wait. Let me hold a light for you. There, now take it easy. There's no hurry unless—unless the police are after you."

"Not yet, perhaps. You'll see it in the papers this morning. When it looked as though I was going broke I liquidated a

safety fund." He pointed to the bags. "Then when that last upward swing came I took a chance. I bought heavily on my nerve, in the millions. It was either make or break. Everything I had is gone but this, and my liabilities as near as I can figure are around two million."

"You mean that you have gone bankrupt and that when the examiners get busy your books will show that you owe two million?"

"That's it."

"Whew!"

"They aren't going to get this. When I get out of prison I'll come back and get you."

"You're going to prison?"

"Hell, yes. I took a long chance speculating with other people's money. I've thought it all out. I'm in bad now but they can't down me permanently."

"But why did you bring the money here?"

"You are the only woman in the world I trust. The only one that knows me who won't gloat over my collapse."

"What's to prevent my stealing it from you?"

"Nothing. I'm taking a chance. I won't be in jail forever. When I get out I'll give you one-fifth of it, one hundred thousand dollars for your trouble. Besides—"

"It's really stolen money, though. I may get in a jam."

"Here's a paper. It gives you all the money. Legally you can't be touched. Besides, when I get out you are going to marry me."

"I'll never marry you, Bill."

"We'll talk about that when I get out."

"Better take your bags and go. I won't marry you. I don't want the responsibility of the money."

"You're to rent safety deposit boxes and gradually store the money away. Rent them in your own name. I'll come back, a year, five years or ten. I'll come back, understand?"

"I won't marry you and I won't keep the money. That's final. Why don't you skip to Cuba, South America or some place?"

"They would extradite me. I probably would get caught before I got away. There's the letter and there's the suitcases. Good-bye."

"Hey, wait, wait!"

She ran to the door. He shoved her aside, unfastened the

catch and opened the door. When she tried to follow him he pushed her back and, ignoring the elevator, dashed down the stairs.

Wanda leaned over the banister, watching him until he turned the corner of the iron staircase. She went back into her apartment and sank into a chair. All she could think of for a minute was his descending staircase after staircase until he reached the street. She went over to the suitcase that she had opened and shut the lid. She locked it. She dragged it toward a closet and hid it beneath some boxes, doing the same with the other bag.

"Golly," she murmured, half humorously. "Me and \$500,000. The only person in the world he trusts and look what I am. It's a crazy world and crazy people live in it."

The pile of cigarette stubs on the ash tray beside Wanda grew slowly higher. It was exasperating how her mind circled all around and then came back to the same unsatisfactory decision. She made up her mind that she would not say anything to anybody, that she would leave the money where it was for two weeks and that at the end of two weeks she would begin storing it away in safety deposit boxes in different banks. Meanwhile, she would watch the newspapers and see what happened to Bill. The letter which he left was signed William Sutherland. The name had a familiar sound. He undoubtedly was a prominent person.

There was nothing in the morning papers but the evening papers carried William Sutherland's picture and a long account of his firm's failure. Finally a headline greeted Wanda in her morning paper that told of his arrest and commented on the surprising fact that one of the country's great financiers was led back to the Tombs unable to meet his bail. No mention was made of the half million still resting beneath hat and shoe boxes in Wanda's closet.

Sutherland's trial dragged along. Wanda decided to leave the money where it was until the trial ended. An unlooked-for development caused her to change her mind and start renting safety deposit boxes and storing the money away.

Torrey had become infatuated with a seventeen-year-old, empty-headed blonde. Wanda first learned about her at an unexpected meeting in a night club that would have been embarrassing to less sophisticated persons than Wanda and

Torrey.

Wanda was with a young chap by the name of Van Stires whom she had met at a party. He reminded her of Van Dyke and was much the same type of individual though a year or two older. Torrey was following the head waiter and escorting the pretty, frivolous blonde. Wanda had just arisen to dance and they met face to face.

Wanda extended her hand, "Hello, old—" she dropped her voice, "two," and then raised it again, "timer."

"Ditto, Wanda."

Introductions followed.

Torrey did not show up for a week. When he finally came to see her, she asked about the girl.

Torrey did not immediately answer. Finally he asked, gazing at the tip of his cigarette, "Do you think she is pretty?"

"I think the word 'pretty' describes her quite adequately."

"I haven't made much progress yet."

"I thought you were going in for that other blonde girl, Jean Wilson. She's worth a million of this dizzy baby-talk innocent."

"You sound almost catty."

"I don't mean to be. Did you make advances to that Jean? I'm interested."

"Yes, I did. I know what Isabel is, just an empty little head on a porcelain body but I'm that way about her. I know Jean is more beautiful. She wouldn't consider my overtures at all because she thought me to be your property."

"Dear Isabel isn't so particular."

"She doesn't understand. She is really innocent."

"What's your line with her, Hamilton?"

"She wants to go on the stage—"

"Oh—and you know an influential producer?"

"Well, I do know several producers at that."

"So you do. I believe you even have told me with my voice and legs I could make Broadway."

"Why don't you let me put you in a show, Wanda? I'll be glad to speak a word for you."

"It's the pay-off, isn't it?"

"Such things are always unpleasant."

"They don't need to be, Hamilton. Of course it always hurts a little to see some little empty-headed minx step in and grab a girl's sugar away from her. Think you'll still

feel the same after you get her?"

"Don't know how long it will last but I don't suppose that you will want to linger around when all my thoughts will be directed elsewhere."

"Of course not. You know, Hamilton, what I enjoyed most about our relationship were the quiet talks we had and our Sunday trips together."

"Why can't I see you once in a while, Wanda, on a friendly basis?"

"Why not? I'll be glad to see you any time. When shall I—er—get out?"

"No hurry. I would like to make you a little present. Money would be more practical and we are both rather practical people."

"We certainly are *this* evening. I'm teasing you, Hamilton. You don't have to make a gift."

"I'd like to. You know I've been making a lot of money."

"Me too, thanks to you. That is your most valuable contribution. I'm tempted to quit my job and spend the daylight hours sitting like a crow all day in brokerage offices. It certainly nets more."

"I'll give you a few thousand to play with."

"Yes, I know. Thanks. Hamilton, what do you think is going to happen to Gladys? She was over here last Sunday moping around. She said she hadn't seen you for a month."

"I've washed my hands of Gladys. Here's a check, Wanda. Could you without inconvenience leave at the end of the month?"

"Of course. I'll move sooner, if you wish."

"No, stay longer if you want. You know, I actually had to plead for three nights before I could get Isabel to visit my apartment."

"Do tell, how annoying. How does she kiss? I suppose you have gotten that far."

"Like a timid, frightened bird."

"Poor little fluttering thing. She'll never soar so high when you clip—"

"Shut up."

"Well, dear, I will for a more thrilling voice. Meanwhile, when the first hot flush of victory cools a bit and you want a quiet glass and cool smoke and an hour or two of silly chatter come see me. It's trite to remark but really it would be

nice to continue as friends."

"Thanks, Wanda. Thanks for being the swell little sport you are. I know Isabel is mere pink and white froth in comparison to you; but—you know."

"I understand. Good luck to you. I'll leave the keys with the superintendent."

"Sorry."

"Nonsense."

Wanda looked at her wrist watch. Nine-thirty. She dialed Clifford Van Stire's number.

The apartment which Van Stires rented for Wanda was smaller than the one Torrey had provided. Wanda liked it better because she chose the furniture and decorations. Clifford was a pair of old shoes in comparison with Hamilton, who could be likened to French-heeled dancing slippers, bright in color and glistening with rhinestones. Wanda had been constantly on her toes with Hamilton. With Clifford she could relax. He liked Wanda with a frank, sturdy affection and appreciation. Younger than Hamilton, he could enjoy life without studying it. Wanda was in the habit of telling him that beneath his well-cut clothes beat a heart of gold. She meant it. He was the sort of man that she would have been proud to own as a brother.

He gradually fell in love with her, and Wanda felt closer to him than she had toward any man, not even excluding Denis.

But she knew that she did not really love Van Stires. She rather wished that she did. Still, she had many other interests. There was her affection for May and a genuine desire to see her get married. Gladys occupied a great deal of her thought. Since Torrey had ceased seeing her she had taken up with other men in a way that Wanda was certain would lead to disaster. Then, too, there was the half million dollars. Bill had been sentenced to five years' imprisonment at Sing Sing.

Wanda visited him and found that there were many little things that she could do for him. She promised to visit him once a month. It was an unpleasant duty but she felt pity for him. He had no one else save a brother in New York who never communicated with him and who had testified against him during the trial. Wanda returned to New York with

the same unreasonable feeling that she had when she saw canaries in cages and dogs on leashes. Freedom was a sweet thing to her.

Charlie's first novel finally was accepted by a publisher. It became a best seller and Wanda was invited to a party in celebration of its success. She could see that Gladys was proud of Charlie and happy in his success. As the party progressed, however, Gladys more and more openly flirted with one of the guests. A pained look came over Charlie's face. It worried Wanda, but there was little she could do. Now, more than ever, she had her own life to work out.

CHAPTER 15

Wanda was about to telephone May when May called her. "I've lost my job. May I drop in and see you?"

"Yes, I'm anxious to see you. Come right over."

"You know, dear," May flung her hat across to a chair, "Denis and I have been living together for three months. What you didn't know is that we have been married for two weeks."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"Try and see you to tell anything! As a matter of fact Denis and I were planning to have you over to dinner and spring it on you."

"I'm happy, dear. It's perfectly swell news about you and Denis."

"He's a perfect dear. I owe so much to you, Wanda. If it weren't for you I would never have met him."

Life became a pleasant but not a particularly exciting affair for Wanda. She had ceased going to Mrs. Jones' house, and devoted her evenings to Clifford. Usually she got up about nine, had breakfast in the apartment house restaurant and then walked to her stock broker's office. She stayed an hour to see how the market was acting and then returned home to study stock charts for another hour or two. The

balance of the morning she read something serious. Following luncheon she sought diversion; a matinee, shopping, or perhaps remaining at home with cigarettes at her elbow and a novel in her lap.

Frequently May and Gladys dropped in during the afternoon. They had become fast friends.

Wanda answered her telephone. "Miss Fulton, the express man is here with a package he wants you to sign for it personally. Shall I send him up?"

"Yes, do, please."

Wanda glanced at the left-hand corner of the package covered with much red sealing wax.

From:

Westwood Van Dyke,

Water View,

West Hampton, N. Y.

She gazed at the package. She had forgotten about him and eighteen months had passed since he had left, so firmly convinced that he would return in just a year to marry her. She cut the cord.

A letter was folded about a small box.

"Dear Girl:

"Maybe you knew that day, when the year ended I would not come back. How sure I was that I would! I had a long talk with the governor that night. I could see he thought that he had a whole year to persuade me otherwise. I smiled inside so sure that he couldn't. He was stronger than I knew. Strong because of money.

"When the year came toward a close he asked me if I were going back to you and I did intend to go back. He offered me an immediate partnership if I didn't. At his death I am to take over everything. If I went back, he told me, with his steely eyes leaving no doubt of his firmness, that he was through. It would have meant poverty for me and for you. That two hundred thousand trust fund is gone. It was tied up with a lot of first mortgages with a company that hadn't lost an investor's dollar in fifty years. They were wiped out and my nest egg with them.

"What can I write except that I was too weak to face it all. Maybe I did feel it would not be fair to ask you to

live on the small salary I would make as a mere job holder with some concern but I don't excuse myself. How you must despise me. You can think no less of me than I do of myself.

"Be assured I know you could have married me. With all my heart I wish you had. Even if my father turned me out I would have had you. I know no other woman will ever be so fine or so worthy.

"Do I care less now? Time may have dulled the edge of painful longing but, even now, I dare not see you for fear of that longing.

"Oh, Wanda, forget me as one beneath you. The package is such a small thing. I like to think of it as our engagement ring. Bless you, darling. I'm grateful for the hours I had. Maybe you would not care for me now. I've lost something, am less than I was when you helped me.

"Please forgive me.

"Boy."

Wanda removed the cover of a white box. Beneath was a small purple plush jewel case. In it was a large, triangle-cut diamond. She flashed it back and forth beneath the electric light. At least five carats, blue white, flawless. It must have cost from five to ten thousand. Without enthusiasm she pushed the ring down in the purple slit of the case. Tomorrow she would put it in one of her safety deposit boxes.

"Afraid to see me. I imagine that even now I could take him away from that smug, self-satisfied father of his. God knows what I would do with him if I did. Wonder if he looks much older? Probably has taken on some sophistication and outward polish, but has deteriorated inside as his letter suggests. At any rate, I wish him luck—and it's a swell diamond.

"Queer how I should be up against a similar problem with Cliff. He wants to marry me, too, and he has guts enough to get away with it. Why should I marry him? I like him real well and that's all. As for his money, if I keep on as I'm going, I'll soon be a bloated capitalist myself. I could retire right now and live comfortably for the rest of my life."

CHAPTER 16

Wanda unexpectedly found her excitement in the morning paper.

CONVICT SHOT IN ESCAPE ATTEMPT

Former Prominent Stock Broker Slain

Making Getaway

Ossining, September 17—William Sutherland, convicted of larceny and serving a five-year term, was killed today by prison guards when attempting to escape. He had served three years of his sentence.

"Poor Billy." Wanda did not finish reading the article. She stood a half minute in indecision and then reached for the telephone. She found that there was a train leaving Grand Central in twenty-five minutes. She could make it. Already dressed, she crammed some extra clothing in a bag which she was in the habit of keeping partly packed. She scribbled a note for May and left the apartment. Not until she walked into the dining car of the train and wrote her breakfast order on the waiter's card did she have time to complete her reading of the newspaper account.

There was not a great deal of detail about the escape itself. There was a statement from the warden who expressed regret, calling Sutherland a model prisoner, quiet and well behaved. "Sutherland must have acted on impulse. Meditation would have assured him of certain failure."

Following the warden's statement was a review of Sutherland's trial and his former affiliations in New York. The article made mention of a brother in New York being the only known relative of the prisoner. "Efforts to get in touch with Harold Sutherland at his home and office in New York were unsuccessful."

Wanda sank her spoon in her grapefruit thoughtfully. She was wondering about the brother in New York and four hundred and ninety-three thousand dollars stored away in several bank vaults.

At the prison she learned that she had been telegraphed for, the message evidently arriving after her hurried departure. She was admitted to the warden's office.

"Glad you came, Miss Fulton. Sutherland's brother won't claim the body and I didn't know but what you might have something to say about the matter."

"Are you sure the brother is the only living relative?"

"Seems to be. We keep very careful histories of all our prisoners." He took up a card from his desk. "Parents and former wife deceased. No visitors except yourself. If he had any friends they deserted him in his trouble."

"Where is he to be buried?"

The warden shrugged. "We can take care of that if necessary."

"Could I?"

"Yes. I can arrange that. There are several cemeteries about here."

"It doesn't seem very kind to bury him in the shadow of this." Wanda gazed through the window to a wall-enclosed yard.

"I see. The record says he was born in Brattleboro, Vermont."

"Why can't he be buried there?"

"He could be if you cared to accompany the body and of course there would be the expense." The warden coughed nervously.

"When could I start?"

"I'll rush it through. I'll have my secretary inquire about trains and all that. This is very fine of you, Miss Fulton. After all, I feel sorry for every man that enters here. Sorry for what he did. Sorry that he has to be locked up. Sorry for him when he leaves."

"Yes, I suppose I should express the bromide, 'crime doesn't pay.' Certainly getting caught doesn't."

"The risk of getting caught, by what you might call the law of averages, makes crime a poor investment."

"Thank you, warden. I will appreciate it if you will have your secretary make arrangements."

At the Brattleboro station a lean, cadaverous man approached Wanda. "I have a car here, madam. I'm the undertaker. There are a few formalities such as papers to be

signed, the purchase of a lot and so forth."

"Can I see the lot first? I want to get this over."

"Certainly."

Wanda picked a location on the side of a hill. She learned that it faced the east and the morning sun. It was very still and peaceful. "I'll want a minister to read whatever it is they read."

"I understand."

The following morning Wanda, the undertaker, two grave diggers and a minister, who drawled, in what Wanda thought must be his "grave" voice, the Episcopal service, stood before a small but ugly gash in the hillside. As Wanda turned after the completion of the brief service, the grave diggers started toward their shining shovels. She shivered slightly. The minister came over to her. "What man does not forgive, madam, God, in His infinite Mercy, often does."

He returned to the station with Wanda and shook her hand as the porter reached for her bag.

"My first drawing room alone," Wanda thought, as the porter opened the door and stood aside for her to enter. "Why not? With Billy's and my own money I am worth almost a million dollars."

Wanda found a problem confronting her upon her arrival back in New York. Clifford met her at the Grand Central.

"How did you know, Cliff, that I would be on this train?"

"I've met all the Brattleboro trains since yesterday noon."

"That's too bad. I could have telegraphed you the one I was taking. You have something on your mind. We'll go to our apartment."

"What is it, Cliff?" she asked a half hour later as he mixed a highball for her.

"It's Gwendolyn. She's holding off for marriage."

"You surely don't want her that much."

"No, I don't, but you know how it is between Gwendolyn and myself. She is very wealthy, more so than my family. A marriage would unite two great fortunes."

"So it would, and be a social triumph, too."

"If you'll marry me, Wanda, I won't marry Gwendolyn."

"Naturally you won't. That would make you a bigamist."

"Wanda, I love you. I don't love Gwendolyn. I think we would be happy. If I marry Gwendolyn I'll have to go abroad

for several months and won't be able to see you."

"I might go along. Doesn't Gwendolyn need a maid or something? Is she cross when knots get in her hair?"

"Darn it, cut it. Be serious. It's important."

"I know it is, Cliff. You're the only man I've ever known that doesn't bore me. Sometimes I think it would be nice to have a home and a husband."

"Marry me then."

"And have some society friend of yours point his finger of scorn at me."

"I'd punch his face."

"Yes, I believe you would. Cliff, I'm afraid I'll miss you. You're the nearest to love I've ever had and I suppose underneath, woman-like, I really want love."

"You have mine, all of it."

"Yes, but you haven't mine, any of it really, only affection. It wouldn't be fair to you."

"I'm willing to take the risk."

"No, Cliff, marry Gwendolyn and give her your name and the safety of marriage. She'll give you babies and a home."

"I've thought about *our* babies."

"No, darling, it would never work."

"Marriage would be a protection to you, Wanda."

"I don't know that I need that protection. It might cramp my style."

"Are you firmly convinced that you don't want to marry me? I had a feeling that you were in doubt when we started this conversation."

"Just a surface doubt. Deep down I have no doubts. It would be a shame to grab you away from dear Gwendolyn."

"It would largely be a marriage of convenience." Clifford spoke thoughtfully.

"Sure it would. I don't know a thing about her. She may be one of those starry eyed brides that will want to eat her honeymoon breakfast perched on your lap. She'll muss your hair and murmur with awe, 'my husband'! Can't you visualize it? The windows opening on the Grand Canal. The soft strains of a Venetian lullaby wafted to your bridal suite. Roses that you, or a more thoughtful hotel management, has set in long slender vases. I hope that you will smell the roses and not the canal. They tell me it really is a sewer."

"You ought to be spanked, darling."

"Suppose you love me instead and afterwards fly, white knight, to fair Gwendolyn and woo her with pretty speeches. St. Thomas's, I suppose, and white veils and flower girls, the wedding march, you two, a perfect match, moving slowly up the aisle while well-mannered necks politely stretch. And outside the great unwashed, clamoring on the sidewalk to see the pretty lady. Go, Cliff, do it. It will be a lot of fun."

"You make it sound easy."

"I want it to sound easy. It's better and there is no use our being dramatic over it."

"And you? What will you be doing?"

"I haven't decided. I've rather reached a turning place in my life. You may be sure that whatever Wanda does she'll do grinning."

When Wanda awoke the next morning and finished her shower she slipped on a dressing gown. She telephoned for breakfast to be served in her room. She wanted to think seriously about her future. She was a rich woman. She did not need to smile at any man. Did she want to go abroad—on some luxurious liner; the Paris boulevards, the Strand in London, Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo?

Ten-thirty. Wanda was unusually restless. For almost the first time in her life she was bored. She decided to call May.

"What are you thinking about so seriously, Wanda?" May asked after they had talked for a while. She ran her hand over Wanda's forehead and pressed against the frown, smoothing out the creases.

"Cliff is getting married, May."

"He should marry you."

"He did suggest it. I was tempted a little to do it."

"I wish you would. I know that you are fully capable of taking care of yourself. Still—oh, well, probably you already have lines out for someone with even more gold." May glanced about at the silk bed coverings and luxurious furnishings.

"May, I think I've made up my mind. I'll go abroad for a year and come back a respectable lady."

"Oh, Wanda, how will I ever get along without you?"

"Now, baby, don't be like that. I won't be gone forever."

"Have you money enough, dear?"

"You'd be surprised. I've plenty. A trip around the world

with no man's whims to cater to, freedom and doing whatever I damn please. Not bad, hey?"

CHAPTER 17

There they were, her friends, May, Gladys, Charlie, Denis, even George and Adeline, and Hamilton, neglecting Isabel for a time, but not Cliff. How kind they all had been. Her cabin, loaded with flowers, books and baskets of fruit that she would turn over to the steward. And now her friends standing together on the pier, already getting smaller in her vision, fading from her as the throaty bass whistle blared forth and the stretch of green water widened. Wanda kept waving her handkerchief as the steamship slowly turned in the river. The pier shrank to playhouse size and disappeared. She was on her way to all the places she had read about, gay Paris and grey London, Stamboul and the bazaar, the temples of India and Port Said—on her way around the world.

Slipping past her were the skyscrapers of Manhattan. How long ago it seemed since she had first seen them as she climbed the Pennsylvania Station stairs and stepped out onto Eighth Avenue. She had worn the black dress that had been purchased for her mother's funeral and now—. Wanda glanced down at her smartly tailored suit and became conscious of a tweed-covered elbow resting close to her gloved hand on the steamer rail.

"I'm a respectable, wealthy woman," she thought, "and I'm very desirable. This tweed-covered elbow will want me. I can take it or reject it." She slowly raised her eyes to find staring at her with frank, intrigued interest a man she judged to be in his late twenties. He was tall with a slender waistline and broad shoulders. Beneath his cap a little wisp of brown hair escaped to curve above a clear, blue eye. A mustache that she knew could tickle pleasantly graced his upper lip and strong white teeth showed themselves between lips parted in a hopeful smile. His firm, rounded jaw suggested a pleasing masculine arrogance. It might be fun to

tease him.

Wanda returned his gaze with just a suspicion of haughtiness, but before she turned to make her way toward her stateroom she smiled. She knew that it was enough. He would seek her out and make his overtures. If she liked him she slowly would permit him to woo and maybe win her. There was no hurry. Six days before they reached Havre. A hand-clasp today, a little pressure on the arm tomorrow, a kiss on the day following and the last night before making port—it might be fun.

Wanda was not at all surprised the next morning when the steward escorted her to her steamer chair to find the man with the tweed-covered elbow ensconced securely in a chair next to hers. For a moment she felt annoyed. Hadn't she left New York to escape just this? It would be pleasant to be alone and gaze over the rolling sea. She thought she could understand a little how a sailor felt about the endless water. One felt alone with it without being lonesome. Unconsciously she extracted a cigarette from her case.

"May I offer you my lighter?"

"Thank you." Wanda puffed thoughtfully.

"Did you ever see that old picture by Gibson entitled, 'A lass that loved a sailor'?"

"No, why?"

"The woman does not look like you. She's old and scrawny, standing on the beach facing the sea. Out yonder, somewhere, she knows, is her husband, embraced in Davy Jones' locker. I imagine in her eyes was something that I saw in yours when you were wrapped in contemplation a moment ago."

"I was thinking about the gowns I intend buying in Paris."

"Prevaricator, you weren't. My name is Richard Carr."

"Indeed?" Wanda moved her head slowly and faced him. She lifted her eyebrows.

"Yes," he answered, not permitting himself to be annoyed. "I have a doctor's degree in business administration and am taking a year abroad before settling down."

"Indeed?" Wanda turned back to her contemplation of the sea.

The man pulled a monogrammed cigarette case out of his pocket and snapped his lighter angrily.

"Are you one of the Oshkosh Carrs?" Wanda asked sweetly, still gazing seaward.

"You are a professional kiddier. Tell me your name and I'll ask you if you are of the Kokomo branch."

"It's Wanda Fulton and I'm not from Kokomo."

"I imagine you are one of the Maine Fultons at that."

"Wrong again. I'm from Fulton Ferry."

"We passed by a Fulton Ferry boat yesterday. I saw it."

"Pa must have gone out for a little sail."

"Here comes the boullion steward. "Want some?"

"Sure, it's free."

"You're a saucy minx, Miss Fulton. What table are you at?"

"At the captain's table."

His face fell. "I'm afraid I can't fix it then."

"I'm not. Here." She handed him a ticket.

"Excuse me then, and I'll go below and try to get transferred to your table. You don't mind?"

She shook her head.

Wanda, who had been used to gifts of cash and jewels, found herself the recipient of books, candy and flowers.

Carr tagged after her continuously. Wanda read him with ease. She knew that he was greatly infatuated with her. Yet, he was typically the man in that he was constantly wondering whether she was the "by marriage only kind." She preferred to keep him guessing. She enjoyed watching his mind falter between two opinions. But there were times, sitting on the boat deck under the stars, with him tense beside her, his voice jerky with hunger for her, that she felt a tingling urge such as she had never before felt for anyone.

It was the next to last night. In two days, for the first time in her life, she would step on foreign soil. She would see a strange flag flying above her head and hear queer sounds issuing from the throats of men and women. France—Paris—a different Wanda; or was she so different? Dick, as she called him now, was like Denis and Cliff and all the other men she had known. A male, yearning for her, sitting beside her with civilization holding him back from saying what he burned to say.

She put her hand on his knee. "Tomorrow will be our last night," she whispered.

It was as though her hand were charged with electricity. She could feel his flesh burning under the light pressure of her hand on his trousered leg. In pity for him she drew away

and then, surprised at her own reaction, realized that this pleased her too. The days at sea in the tonic-laden air had made her blood sing in her body. She felt so keenly alive physically that she appreciated as never before the expression, "I could bite nails." She was a respectable lady; how could she encourage him without losing this new status that she had built up for herself?

"Dick, the night is too beautiful. I can't quite stand it. I think I'll leave you and sit on my private deck and gaze alone at the stars."

"If you do leave me I will sit on my own veranda and do the same. Must we dream alone? Can't we sit together, just we two?"

"I don't know," her voice suggested doubt, "it would be nice but—"

"Please," he broke in, an intoxicating hope surging through him, "it would be so perfect. It is almost our last night. You have come to mean so much to me." He held his hand out to her.

"I really shouldn't," she answered hesitatingly.

"Alone," he spoke very low, "alone in our little world. It's wonderful to be here beside you, so intimate as though—as though we were newly married," he finished bravely, giving a backward glance toward her suite and the bed that stood revealed beyond an open door.

"I'm afraid that I'm being very indiscreet to be here alone with you." She rested her head on his shoulder.

His arm closed about her. She let one hand fall carelessly in his lap. His body twitched. She sighed. His arm tightened. She smiled in the darkness. It was now only a matter of her showing the proper reluctance. Innocently she moved her hand slightly, stretching her fingers. She delighted in the quiver that went through him. She buried her head more snugly in his shoulder. His other arm wrapped itself about her.

"Wanda, I—you—oh, I can't stand to think that perhaps I'll never see you again."

"You mean," she asked in a small voice, "that you love me?"

"Yes, yes, my dear, you—" He left his sentence uncompleted as he kissed her.

But he held her lightly in his arms and kissed her gently. This was not what she had expected. It was pleasant, but no man had ever kissed her like that. Perhaps, after all, she had

lost her ability to excite men. Perhaps he felt that there was something lacking in her. Or he was not as interested as he had seemed.

For the first time in her life Wanda felt an unquenchable desire for a man begin to creep through her own body. She wanted Dick Carr to take her in his arms and hold her tight, to demand her, she wanted to feel his lips hard and urgent against hers, she wanted his hands to touch her eagerly and she wanted to make him feel the same terrible desire that now, for the first time, she knew a man could arouse in her.

She got up from the deck chair and walked over toward the rail. Dick followed her immediately. Before she had reached the rail he had taken her by her shoulders and turned her toward himself. Instantly she put her arms around him and held her body close. If he kissed her again she knew that all the desire and passion beating in her own blood must find some answering beat in his.

This time his lips were rougher upon hers, she breathed softly against them, "Don't, Dick, please—" and then she pressed against him and held his lips while his body strained against her.

There was the light tap of a footstep along the deck and he let her go. Again, for the first time in her life, Wanda was the one who regretted that a man had left an embrace unfinished.

Whatever this was, the sea, the new life that the ocean had brought back into her body, or the pleasant, endless, lazy days, it was something new. Wanda had started playing with a man's emotions. Now she wasn't quite sure if it was going to turn out as she had planned it at all.

Whosever step had sounded along the deck had gone now. Dick walked to the rail and stood staring out at the sea. Wanda walked over to him and leaned against him, ever so slightly.

"I never felt like this before," she said simply.

"I'm not sure how I feel at all," he said slowly, "but perhaps we ought to find out. What do you think it is, Wanda, a ship-board romance? Then why don't we carry it out. Come on, kiss me again and then let's go into the cabin. Only I'm not sure that that's quite what I want."

Wanda drew away. This could go all wrong in a minute. Was there something about the way she kissed? About the

way she held him? Was there even something about the way her body reacted to men that had told Dick the truth?

Whatever it was, she had to be cautious. She had never had to worry about a man's feelings before, even Denis had taken what she offered him and would have married her or not, just as she chose. This was an odd man, but perhaps that was part of the attraction.

"I think we will go inside—after you kiss me again—but you go to your cabin and I'll go to mine. This may be a ship-board romance, but it's not that kind—and I, Mr. Carr," she added with as light a laugh as she could, "am not a ship-board romancer."

"I'm sorry, Wanda," he said quickly, "I didn't mean that. I knew—but, of course, oh, hell—"

His arms were around her again and this time she let him kiss her without any answer in her body, though her lips couldn't let him go. But at last she forced him away and patting his cheek, said, "Good night, Richard—dear—I'll see you in the morning."

She was in her cabin before he could stop her, but once there she couldn't sleep. What had happened? What had stopped him, just as he was about to take her, demand her? Did he, but no he couldn't possibly know about her. Then what had *she* done? What had changed Richard Carr and what had kept him from behaving as every other man she had ever known always behaved when the promise of Wanda was about to become an actuality?

That, she told herself, is the one thing she now had to find out. But why? Why should he be important to her, why should she care, a woman with money, beauty and all the time and all the world ahead of her?

There was only one answer. This was probably love. This was what had happened to May and Denis and Gladys, perhaps, and to all the people who told her that no woman could live for money alone, or could use men merely as steps to it.

But she was still Wanda and her mind could still control her when it was for her own good. If it was love she could find out, and in the meantime, she had better get some sleep if she intended to see Dick early in the morning, and that was exactly what she knew she must do.

It was a beautiful day and Wanda was at breakfast early.

But Dick wasn't there. He didn't show up during the meal and Wanda had to try to make conversation with a Mr. and Mrs. Pritchett who were on their way to Europe from Akron and spent all their time telling other people about what a wonderful state Ohio is. By the time breakfast was over and she could leave, she was angry, puzzled and a little scared. Suppose he didn't want to see her again!

She began a walk around the deck. She was just starting the third turn when Dick Carr called her.

"Wanda, I've been looking for you."

"Not for very long, sleepy-head. I've had breakfast and been up for hours."

"No, not for long. I've been down in my cabin. I've been thinking. Wanda, I'd like to talk with you."

They went to the upper deck and found a couple of chairs.

Dick reached over and took her hand. Wanda pressed his and then released it. She wasn't quite sure how to treat Dick Carr.

"Wanda, this may sound crazy to you," he began, "especially since we've known each other so little time. But when I said I love you last night, I really meant it. At first I wasn't sure. I wanted you, of course, but if it had turned out that way, it would have been just another affair. We'd have left each other at the boat tomorrow and no hard feelings. Fun and all that. Only I don't feel that way at all, and I don't think you do. And that's what I want you to tell me before I go on."

"To tell you what?" she asked.

"Why, if you feel the same about me."

Wanda's heart beat fast. This was not going to be difficult after all. If she wanted to get married, if she wanted a new life, a completely different life, this was it. She wondered that this could have happened, though, with Dick Carr in a way so different from Denis, from Van Dyke, from any other man. It wasn't her body that had worked this miracle, but something else. What a puzzle this man was.

"Why, Dick," she answered at last, "I think you know how I feel about you."

He sighed. Then pressed her hand. "Good, but Darling, that brings me to the hardest part of all."

"What do you mean? What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, nothing the matter, Wanda. But what I've got to tell you might make a difference. You see, I've been married

before."

"Oh, Dick," she said, relieved, "but lots of men have. You are divorced, aren't you?"

"Yes, Wanda, I am. But that's not the thing. My marriage was a failure for a reason that probably makes me seem strange to you. In short, my wife and I were incompatible. That is, she said, I was incompatible, that she couldn't enjoy sex with me. Of course, there is another side to it. I couldn't find the kind of love in her that most men want."

Wanda watched him, wondering. How could this man, so firm, so masculine, so desirable, not have appealed to any woman?

"I can't understand it," she told him.

"Oh, it happens often enough," he said.

"That isn't what I meant. I mean I can't understand, oh, Dick, I can't understand any woman not loving you, not feeling happy, complete, in your arms."

He arose and took her hands, lifting her out of her chair. They melted into each other's arms. This was the kiss Wanda had been waiting for. This was the kiss she answered with her lips and her body and all her desire. Dick's breath came fast as he moved his lips away. "Wanda, that's why last night I wanted you, that's why now I want you to come to your cabin with me. Or to mine. Wanda, this time I can't make another mistake. Not only for my sake, but for yours, too. That's what frightens me. Suppose I'm wrong. Suppose we're wrong for each other. I couldn't stand it—for you as well as myself."

Wanda moved away. Now her thoughts were racing through her mind. Be careful, she told herself. How much do you know about this man? With all her experience, with all the men she had known, how much did she know? Could this be some sort of trick, an easy way to a few pleasant hours on a ship with a girl Dick Carr didn't know how to get any other way?

She burned for a moment with embarrassment. What a joke if she, Wanda Fulton, rich, experienced, knowing more about love and men than a million other women, what if she should be taken in now just because she was on board a ship and probably bored.

Dick must have sensed some anxiety. "I know, Wanda, I know that I'm asking a great deal and asking it on short

notice, of a girl like you. But I hoped you might understand."

When she looked at him again she was convinced. No man could look that sincere and hurt if he wasn't honest. She almost pinched herself.

"What do you mean a girl like me?" she asked. "You don't really know much about me."

"I think I know enough," he said.

"No," she said, "I want to tell you more."

Then she told him something about the life of Wanda Fulton. She told him about her parents and her hard, poor life. She told him of running away after her mother had died. She told him of going to New York and working. But she did not tell him about Mr. Hummel, or Mrs. Jones, or of the life that had finally enabled her to take this trip. She told him of a friendship with a man named Bill who was in the market and who had given her advice. She told him that she had been in the market herself and made some particularly fortunate investments, that she had made money. She told him that she knew something about love, that she had had an unfortunate affair herself.

Before she could finish, Dick stopped her, holding his hand over her mouth.

"Wanda, I don't want to hear. I don't care. Nothing you could tell me could possibly make any difference in the way I feel about you. There is only one important thing. Us. Can we be happy together? Don't you see, I've got to know. You've got to know, too."

Wanda moved again into the wonderful circle of his arms. She felt his body against her and she knew that he was thrilled by the closeness of her. Again she felt desire such as she had never realized a woman could feel. She was ready to do anything this man told her. And yet she realized that she must be careful. So much depended on how she acted, so much on how his own desire made him act toward her. She knew that she mustn't throw away his love on a gamble.

"Dick, Darling," she said, reaching up to kiss him, "I want to think about what you told me. I want to think about myself—and us. Let me go now. I'll see you tonight—at dinner."

Wanda dressed for dinner that night more carefully than she had ever dressed before. When she met Dick she could see in his eyes that she had dressed well. They ate dinner without a word of what had passed between them in the fore-

noon. They talked of their trip and their plans as if this were not the last night on ship and as if they might as likely part on the next day. Of course they were both conscious of the others at the table.

But there was an atmosphere of gaiety over the whole ship. After dinner there was to be a grand ball. They left together and walked toward the deck.

"Would you like to dance?" Dick asked.

"Yes, I would. If you don't mind."

They danced and Wanda began to feel that she could never leave his arms again. She had only to look into Dick's eyes to know what he was thinking. She could feel, whenever her body touched him or when he held her tightly, that his thoughts were much the same as hers.

When they finished that dance it was Wanda who suggested they go up on the deck. She led him to the same spot where they had been the night before.

Dick put his hands on her shoulders, holding her at arm's length, looking at her.

"You're so beautiful," he said quietly.

"You're a handsome man yourself, Mr. Carr," she answered. Then she reached up and grasped his lapels, pulling him gently toward her.

"Wanda, before I kiss you, I've got to know. Have you thought about—this afternoon?"

"Yes," she said. "Almost nothing else."

"And have you decided—anything?"

Wanda shook her head. "I haven't been able to, Dick. I don't think I can. Whatever I decide, you've got to decide for me. Whatever I do, Dick, I guess is up to you."

Now he pulled her toward him gently. She pressed herself against him as if she could not bear to leave him ever. Her hands went around his neck as she turned her face up to him. Nothing mattered now, nothing except her lips against his, her body close to him. He glued his mouth on hers and ran his hand through her hair and across her cheeks and down her neck to the top of her dress yoke. A savage sound came from his throat and his face crushed into her breasts.

She murmured, "No, oh no, Dick dear," shoving with her hands against him but only lightly.

"Please. We'll get married in France," he choked. "Wanda darling, don't you understand? Don't you feel as I do?"

"Oh, Dick, I do. You know I do. But is it wrong, Dick dear? Could it be wrong, Dick, loving you so much?"

"It isn't wrong. It can't be." His hands moved over her body and down toward her legs.

"Dick, Dick, you mustn't."

He withdrew slightly. She threw her arms about him. "No, no—"

"Yes," he said, his voice vibrating with a sort of triumph as his hands sought their way to her silken knees.

She kept silent. Only as he lifted her in his arms and staggered into her cabin did she murmur, her lips smiling in the night, "It must be the sea."

She smiled later, in the darkness as he lay quietly beside her. Wanda, the respectable, wealthy woman—tomorrow, France and the boat train—Paris and Frenchmen.

"Wanda, will you marry me?"

She did not immediately answer. Marriage, a home and Dick with his firm jaw and determined masculinity? Dick every night, free to demand her! Awakening the morning after and her slipping into her shower to wash the night away but knowing Dick was still there—undismissable, unescapable, permanent! Her independence? Dick buying her clothes, commenting about her friends, planning her life—Dick alone? Going together to all the places she had planned or perhaps to the places he decided upon and then back to New York. Dick for every morning breakfast. Dick every night and only Dick.

"Darling, you needn't feel you have to marry me."

"But I—want to."

"Well, perhaps."

THE END

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